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THE WEARIED CHRIST

AND OTHER SERMONS by

Alexander Maclaren D.D.

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I.

The Wearied Christ.

"Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well."

"He said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of."—John iv. 6 and 32.

TWO pictures result from these two verses, each striking in itself, and gaining additional emphasis by the contrast. It was near the close of a long, hot day's march that a tired band of pedestrians turned into the fertile valley. There, whilst the disciples went into the little hill-village to purchase, if they could, some food from the despised inhabitants, Jesus, apparently too exhausted to accompany them, "sat *thus* on the well." That little word *thus* seems to have a force difficult to reproduce in English. It is apparently intended to enhance the idea of utter weariness, either because the word "wearied" is in thought to be supplied, "sat, being thus wearied, on the well"; or because it conveys the notion which might be expressed by our "just as He was"; as a tired man flings himself down anywhere and anyhow, without any kind of preparation beforehand, and not much caring where it is that he rests,

Thus, utterly worn out, Jesus Christ sits on the well, whilst the western sun lengthens out the shadows on the plain. The disciples come back, and what a change they find! Hunger gone, exhaustion ended, fresh vigour in their wearied Master. What had made the difference? The woman's repentance and joy. And He unveils the secret of His reinvigoration when He says, "I have meat to eat which ye know not of"—the hidden manna. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."

Now, I think if we take just three points of view, we shall gain the lessons of this remarkable contrast. Note, then, the wearied Christ; the devoted Christ; the reinvigorated Christ.

I.—The wearied Christ.

How precious it is to us that this gospel, which has the loftiest things to say about the manifest Divinity of our Lord, and the glory that dwelt in Him, is always careful to emphasize also the manifest limitations and weaknesses of His Manhood! John never forgets either term of his great sentence in which all the gospel is condensed, "the Word became flesh." Ever he shows us "the Word"; ever "the flesh." Thus it is he only who records the saying on the Cross, "I thirst." It is he who tells us how Jesus Christ, not merely for the sake of getting a convenient opening of a conversation, or to conciliate prejudices, but because He needed what He asked, said to the woman of Samaria: "Give Me to drink." So the weariness of the Master stands forth for us as pathetic proof that it was no shadowy investiture with an apparent Manhood to which He stooped, but a real participation in our limitations and weaknesses, so

that work to Him was fatigue, even though in Him dwelt the manifest glory of that Divine nature which "fainteth not, neither is weary."

Not only does this pathetic incident teach us, for our firmer faith, and more sympathetic and closer apprehension, the reality of the Manhood of Jesus Christ, but it supplies likewise some imperfect measure of His love, and reveals to us one condition of His power. Ah! If He had not Himself known weariness, He never could have said, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It was because Himself "took our infirmities," and amongst these the weaknesses of tired muscles and exhausted frame, that "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that hath no might He increaseth strength." The Creator must have no share in the infirmities of the creature. It must be His unwearied power that calls them all by their names; and because He is great in might "not one" of the creatures of His hand can "fail." But the Redeemer must participate in that from which He redeems; and the condition of His strength being "made perfect in our weakness" is that our weakness shall have cast a shadow upon the glory of His strength. The measure of His love is seen in that, long before Calvary, He entered into the humiliation and sufferings and sorrows of humanity; a condition of His power is seen in that, forasmuch as the "children were partakers of flesh and blood," He also Himself likewise took part of the same, "not only that through death He might deliver" from death, but that in life He might redeem from the ills and sorrows of life.

Nor does that exhausted Figure, reclining on

Jacob's Well, preach to us only what *He* was. It proclaims to us likewise what *we* should be. For if His work was carried on to the edge of His capacities, and if He shrank not from service because it involved toil, what about the professing followers of Jesus Christ, who think that they are exempted from any form of service because they can plead that it will weary them? What about those who say that they tread in His footsteps, and have never known what it was to yield up one comfort, one moment of leisure, one thrill of enjoyment, or to encounter one sacrifice, one act of self-denial, one aching of weariness for the sake of the Lord that bore all for them? The wearied Christ proclaims His manhood, proclaims His divinity and His love, and rebukes us who consent to "walk in the way of His commandments" only on condition that it can be done without dust or heat; and who are ready to run the race that is set before us, only if we can come to the goal without perspiration or turning a hair. "Jesus, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well."

II.—Still further, notice here the devoted Christ.

It is not often that He lets us have a glimpse into the innermost chambers of His heart, in so far as the impelling motives of His course are concerned. But here He lays them bare. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."

Now, it is no mere piece of grammatical pedantry when I ask you to notice that the language of the original is so constructed as to give prominence to the idea that the aim of Christ's life was the doing of the Father's will; and that it is the aim rather than the actual performance and realization of the aim which

is pointed at by our Lord. The words would be literally rendered, "My meat is *that I may do* the will of Him that sent Me and finish His work"—that is to say, the very nourishment and refreshment of Christ was found in making the accomplishment of the Father's commandment His ever-impelling motive, His ever-pursued goal. The expression carries us into the inmost heart of Jesus, dealing, as it does, with the one all-pervading motive rather than with the resulting actions, fair and holy as these were.

Brethren, the secret of our lives, if they are at all to be worthy and noble, must be the same—the recognition, not only as they say now, that we have a mission, but that there *is* a Sender (which is a wholly different view of our position), and that He who sends is the loving Father, who has spoken to us in that dear Son, who Himself made it His aim thus to obey, in order that it might be possible for to us re-echo His voice, and to repeat His aim. The recognition of the Sender, the absolute submission of our wills to His, must run through all the life. You may do your daily work, whatever it be, with this for its motto, "The will of the Lord be done." And they who thus can look at their trade, or profession, and see the trivialities and monotonies of their daily occupations, in the transfiguring light of that great thought, will never need to complain that life is small, ignoble, wearisome, insignificant. As with pebbles in some clear brook with the sunshine on it, the water in which they are sunk glorifies and magnifies them. If you lift them out, they are but bits of dull stone; lying beneath the sunlit ripples they are jewels. Plunge the prose of your life, and all its

trivialities, into that great stream, and it will magnify and glorify the smallest and the homeliest. Absolute submission to the Divine will, and the ever-present thrilling consciousness of doing it, were the secret of Christ's life, and ought to be the secret of ours.

Note the distinction between doing the will and perfecting the work. That implies that Jesus Christ, like us, reached forward, in each successive act of obedience to the successive manifestations of the Father's will, to something still undone. The work will never be perfected or finished except on condition of continual fulfilment, moment by moment, of the separate behests of that Divine will. For the Lord, as for His servants, this was the manner of obedience, that He "pressed towards the mark," and by individual acts of conformity secured that at the last the whole "work" should have been so completely accomplished that He might be able to say upon the Cross, "It is finished." Thus, if we have any right to call ourselves His, we, too, have to live.

III.—Lastly, notice the reinvigorated Christ.

I have already pointed out the lovely contrast between the two pictures, the beginning and the end of this incident; so I need not dwell upon that. The disciples wondered when they found that Christ desired and needed none of the homely sustenance that they had brought to Him. And when He answered their sympathy rather than their curiosity —for they did not ask Him any questions, but they said to Him, "Master, eat"—with "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," they in their blind, blundering fashion, could only imagine that somebody had brought Him something. So they gave occasion

for the great words upon which we have been touching.

Notice, however, that Christ here sets forth the lofty aim at conformity to the Divine will, and fulfilment of the Divine work, as being the meat of the soul. It is the true nourishment for us all. The spirit which feeds upon such food will grow and be nourished. And the soul which feeds upon its own will and fancies, and not upon the plain brown bread of obedience, which is wholesome, though it be often bitter, will feed upon ashes, which will grate upon the teeth and hurt the palate. Such a soul will be like those wretched infants that you find sometimes at "baby-farms," as people call them, starved and stunted, and not grown to half their right size. If you would have your spirits strong, robust, well-nourished—live by obedience, and let the will of God be the food of your souls, and all will be well.

Souls thus fed can do without a great deal that others need Why, enthusiasm for anything lifts a man above physical necessities and lower desires, even in its poorest forms. A regiment of soldiers making a forced march, or athlete's trying to break the record, will tramp, tramp on, not needing food, or rest, or sleep, until they have achieved their purpose, poor and ignoble though it may be. In all regions of life, enthusiasm and lofty aims make the soul lord of the body and of the world.

And in the Christian life we shall be thus lords, exactly in proportion to the depth and earnestness of our desires to do the will of God. They who thus are fed can afford "to scorn delights and live laborious days." They who thus are fed can afford to do with

plain living, if there be high impulses as well as high thinking. And sure I am that nothing is more certain to stamp out the enthusiasm of obedience, which ought to mark the Christian life, than the luxurious fashion of living which is getting so common to-day amongst professing Christians.

It is not in vain that we have the old story about the children whose faces were radiant and whose flesh was firmer, when they were fed on pulse and water than were theirs who feasted on the wine and dainties of the Babylonish court. "Set a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite." And let us remember that the less we use, and the less we feel that we need, of outward goods, the nearer do we approach to the condition in which holy desires and lofty aims will visit our spirits.

I commend to you, brethren, the story of our text, in almost its literal application, as well as in the loftier spiritual lessons that may be drawn from . To be near Christ, and to desire to live for Him, deliver us from dependence upon earthly things; and in those who thus do live the old word shall be fulfilled, "Better is a little that a righteous man hath than the abundance of many wicked."

II.

Christ's Finished and Unfinished Work.

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up."—Acts i. 1, 2.

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."—Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

O begins and so ends this book. I connect the commencement and the close, because I think that the juxtaposition throws great light upon the purpose of the writer, and suggests some very important lessons. The reference to "the former treatise" (which is, of course, the Gospel according to Luke) implies that this book is to be regarded as its sequel, and the terms of the reference show the writer's own conception of what he was going to do in his second volume. "The former treatise have I made . . . of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up." Is not the natural inference that the latter treatise will tell us what Jesus *continued* "to do and teach" *after* He was taken up? I think so. And thus the writer

sets forth at once, for those that have eyes to see, what he means to do, and what he thinks his book is going to be about.

So, then, the name "the Acts of the Apostles," which is not coeval with the book itself, is somewhat of a misnomer. Most of the apostles are never heard of in it. There are, at the most, only three or four of them concerning whom anything is recorded. And our first text supplies a reason for regarding that title as inadequate, and even misleading. For, if the theme of the story be what Christ did, then the book is not the "Acts of the *Apostles*," but the Acts of *Jesus Christ* through His servants. He, and He alone, is the Actor; and the men that appear are but the instruments in His hands, He alone being the mover of the pawns on the board.

That conception of the purpose of the "treatise" seems to me to be confirmed by, and to explain, the singular abruptness of the conclusion which must strike every reader. No doubt it is quite possible that the reason why the book ends in such a singular fashion, planting Paul in Rome, and leaving him there, may be that the date of its composition was that imprisonment of Paul in the imperial city, in a part of which, at all events, we know that Luke was his companion. But, whilst that consideration may explain the point at which the record stops, it does not explain the way in which it stops. The historian lays down his pen, possibly because he had brought his narrative up to date. But a word of conclusion explaining that it was so would have been very natural, and its absence must have had some reason. It is also possible that the arrival of the Apostle in the imperial city

and his unhindered liberty of preaching there, in the very centre of power, the focus of intellectual life, and the hot-bed of corruption for the known world, may have seemed to the writer an epoch which rounded off his story. But I think that the reason for the abruptness of the record's close is to be found in the continuity of the work of which it tells a part. It is the unfinished record of an incomplete work. The theme is the work of Christ through the ages, of which each successive depository of His energies can do but a small portion, and must leave that portion unfinished; the book does not so much end as stop. It is a fragment, because the work of which it tells of is not yet a whole.

If, then, we put these two things—the beginning and the ending of this book—together, I think we get some thoughts about what Christ began to do and teach on earth; what He continues to do and teach in heaven; and how small and fragmentary a share in that work each individual servant of His has. Let us look at these things briefly.

I.—First, then, we have here the suggestion of what Christ began to do and teach on earth.

Now, at first sight, the words of our text seem to be in strange and startling contradiction to the solemn cry which rang out of the darkness upon Calvary. Jesus said, "It is finished!" and gave up the ghost." Luke says He "began to do and teach." *Is* there any contradiction between the two? Certainly not. It is one thing to lay a foundation; it is another thing to build a house. And the work of laying the foundation must be finished before the work of building the structure upon it can be begun. It is one thing

to create a force; it is another thing to apply it. It is one thing to compound a medicine; it is another thing to administer it. It is one thing to unveil a truth; it is another thing to unfold its successive applications, and to work it into a belief and practice in the world. The former is the work of Christ which was finished on earth; the latter is the work which is continuous throughout the ages.

"He began to do and teach," not in the sense that any should come after Him and (as the disciples of most great discoverers and thinkers have had to do) systematize, rectify, and complete the first glimpses of truth which the master had given. "He began to do and teach," not in the sense that, after He had passed into the heavens, any new truth or force can for evermore be imparted to humanity, in regard of the subjects which He taught and the energies which He brought.

But whilst thus His work is complete, His earthly work is also initial. And we must remember that whatever distinction my text may mean to draw between the work of Christ in the past and that in the present and the future, it does not mean to imply that when He ascended up on high, He had not completed the task for which He came, or that the world had to wait for anything more, either from Him or from others, to eke out the imperfections of His doctrine, or the insufficiencies of His acts.

Let us ever remember that the initial work of Christ on earth is complete, in so far as the revelation of God to men is concerned. There will be no other. There is needed no other. Nothing more is possible than what He, by His words and by His life, by His

gentleness and His grace, by His patience and His passion, has unveiled to all men, of the heart and character of God. The revelation is complete, and He that professes to add anything to, or to substitute anything for, the finished teaching of Jesus Christ concerning God, and man's relation to God, and man's duty, destiny, and hopes, is a false teacher, and to follow him is fatal. All that ever come after Him and say, "Here is something that Christ has not told you," are thieves and robbers, "and the sheep will not hear them."

In like manner that work of Christ, which in some sense is initial, is complete as Redemption. "This Man has offered up one sacrifice for sins for ever." And nothing more can He do than He has done; and nothing more can any man or all men do than was accomplished on the Cross of Calvary. As a revelation, as effecting a redemption, as lodging in the heart of humanity, and in the midst of the stream of human history, a purifying energy, sufficient to cleanse the whole black river, the past work which culminated on the Cross, and was sealed as adequate and accepted of God, in the Resurrection and Ascension, needs no supplement, and can have no continuation, world without end. And so, whatever may be the meaning of that singular phrase, "began to do and to teach," it does not, in the smallest degree, conflict with the assurance that He hath ascended up on high, having obtained eternal redemption for us, and having finished the work which the Father gave Him to do.

II.—But then, secondly, we have to notice what Christ continues to do and to teach after His ascension.

I have already suggested that the phraseology of the first of my texts naturally leads to the conclusion that the theme of this book of the Acts is the continuous work of the ascended Saviour; and that the language is not forced by being thus interpreted is very obvious to anyone who will glance even cursorily over the contents of the book itself. For there is nothing in it more obvious and remarkable than the way in which, at every turn in the narrative, all is referred to Jesus Christ Himself.

For instance, to cull one or two cases in order to bring the matter more plainly before you—When the Apostles determined to select another Apostle to fill Judas' place, they asked Jesus Christ to show which "of these two Thou hast chosen." When Peter is called upon to explain the tongues at Pentecost he says, "Jesus hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." When the writer would tell the reason of the large first increase to the church, he says, "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Peter and John go into the Temple to heal the lame man, and their words to him are, "Do not think that our power or holiness is any factor in your cure. The Name hath made this man whole." It is the Lord that appears to Paul and to Ananias, the one on the road to Damascus and the other the city. It is the Lord to whom Peter refers Æneas when he says, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." It was the Lord that "opened the heart of Lydia." It was the Lord that appeared to Paul in Corinth, and said to him, "I have much people in this city"; and again, when in the prison at Jerusalem, He assured the Apostle that he would be

carried to Rome. And so, at every turn in the narrative, we find that Christ is presented as influencing men's hearts, operating upon outward events, working miracles, confirming His word, leading His servants, and prescribing for them their paths, and all which they do is done by the hand of the Lord with them, confirming the word which they spoke. Jesus Christ is the Actor, and He only is the Actor, men are His implements and instruments.

The same point of view is suggested by another of the characteristics of this book, which it shares in common with all Scripture narratives, and that is the stolid indifference with which it picks up and drops men, according to the degree in which, for the moment, they are the instruments of Christ's power. Suppose a man had been writing Acts of the Apostles, do you think it would have been possible that of the greater number of them he should not say a word, that concerning those of whom he does speak he should deal with them as this book does—barely mentioning the martyrdom of James, one of the four chief apostles; allowing Peter to slip out of the narrative after the great meeting of the church at Jerusalem; letting Philip disappear without a hint of what he did thereafter; lodging Paul in Rome and leaving him there, with no account of his subsequent work or martyrdom? Such phenomena—and they might be largely multiplied—are only explicable upon one hypothesis. As long as electricity streams on the carbon point it glows and is visible, but when the current is turned to another lamp we see no more of the bit of carbon. As long as God uses a man, the man is of interest to the writers of the Scripture. When God uses another one,

they drop the first, and have no more care about him because their theme is not men and their doings, but God's doings through men.

On us, and in us, and by us, and for us, if we are His servants, Jesus Christ is working all through the ages. He is the Lord of Providence, He is the King of history, in His hand is the book with the seven seals; He sends His Spirit, and where His Spirit is He is; and what His Spirit does He does. And thus He continues to teach and to work from His throne in the heavens.

He continues to teach, not by the communication of new truth. That is done. The volume of revelation is complete. The last word of the Divine utterances hath been spoken, until that final word which shall end Time and crumble the earth. But the application of the completed Revelation, the unfolding of all that is wrapped in germ in it; the growing of the seed into a tree, the realization more completely by individuals and communities of the principles and truths which Jesus Christ has brought us by His life and His death—that is the work that is going on to-day, and that will go on till the end of the world. For the old Puritan belief is true, though the modern rationalistic mutilations of it are false, "God hath more light yet to break forth"—and our modern men stop there. But what the sturdy old Puritan said was, "more light yet to break forth from His holy Word." Jesus Christ teaches the ages—through the lessons of providence, and the communication of His Spirit to His Church—to understand what He gave the world when He was here.

In like manner He works. The foundation is laid

the healing medicine is prepared, the cleansing element is cast into the mass of humanity; what remains is the application and appropriation, and incorporation in conduct, of the redeeming powers that Jesus Christ has brought. And that work is going on, and will go on, till the end.

Now these truths of our Lord's continuous activity in teaching and working from heaven may yield us some not unimportant lessons. What a depth and warmth and reality the thoughts give to the Christian's relation to Jesus Christ! We have to look back to that Cross as the foundation of all our hope. Yes! But we have to think, not only of a Christ who did something for us long ago in the past, and there an end, but of a Christ who to-day lives and reigns, to do and to teach according to our necessities. What sweetness and sacredness such thoughts impart to all external events, which we may regard as being the operation of His love, and moved by the hands that were nailed to the cross for us, and now hold the sceptre of the universe for the blessing of mankind! What a fountain of hope they open in estimating future probabilities of victory for truth and goodness! The forces of good and evil in the world seem very disproportionate, but we forget too often to take Christ into account. It is not we that have to fight against evil, we are but at the best the sword which Christ wields, and all the power is in the hand that wields it. Great men die, good men die: Jesus Christ is not dead. Paul was martyred. He lives; He is the anchor of our hope. We see miseries and mysteries enough, God knows. The prospects of all good causes seem often clouded and dark. The world has an

awful power of putting drags upon all chariots that bear blessings, and of turning to evil every good. You cannot diffuse education, but you diffuse the taste for rubbish, and something worse in the shape of books. No good thing but has its shadow of evil attendant upon it. And if we had only to estimate by visible or human forces we might well sit down and wrap ourselves in the sackcloth of pessimism. "We see not yet all things put under Him"; but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour, and the vision that cheered the first martyr—of Christ standing at the right hand of God—is the rebuke of every fear and every gloomy anticipation for ourselves or for the world.

What lessons of lowliness and of diligence it gives us! The jangling people at Corinth fought about whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas were the man to lead the Church, and the experience has been repeated over and over again. "Who is Paul? Who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. Be not puffed up one against another. Be not wise in your own conceits." You are only a tool, only a pawn in the hand of the great player. If you have anything, it is because you get it from Him. See that you use it, and do not brag about it. Jesus Christ is the Worker, the only Worker; the Teacher, the only Teacher. All our wisdom is derived, all our light is enkindled. We are but the reeds through which His breath makes music. And shall the axe boast itself either against, or apart from, Him that heweth therewith?

III.—Lastly, we note the incompleteness of each man's share in the great work.

As I said, the book which is to tell the story of Christ's continuous work from Heaven must stop abruptly. There is no help for it. If it were a history of Paul it would need to be wound up to an end and a selvage put to it, but as it is the history of Christ's working, the web is not half finished, and the shuttle stops in the middle of a cast. The book must be incomplete, because the work of which it is the record does not end, until He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to the Father, and God shall be all in all.

So the work of each one is but a fragment of that great work. Every man inherits unfinished tasks from his predecessors, and leaves unfinished tasks to his successors. It is, as it used to be in the middle ages, when the men that dug the foundations, or laid the first courses of some great cathedral, were dead, long generations before the gilded cross was set on the apex of the needle-spire, and the glowing glass filled in to the painted windows. Enough for us, if we are represented, though by but one stone in one of the courses of the great building.

Luke has left plenty of blank paper at the end of his second treatise, on which he meant that succeeding generations should write their partial contributions to the completed work. Dear friends, let us see that we write our little line, as monks in their monasteries used to keep the chronicle of the house, on which scribe after scribe toiled at his illuminated letters with loving patience for a little while, and then handed the pen from dying hands to another. What does it matter though we drop, having done but a fragment? Christ gathers up the fragments into His completed

work, and the imperfect services which He enabled any of us to do will all be represented in the perfect circle of His finished work. The Lord help us to be faithful to the power that works in us and to leave Him to incorporate our fragments in His mighty whole!

III.

The Resurrection as a Foundation Fact of the Gospel.*

I DELIVERED unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."—1 COR. xv. 3, 4.

HRISTMAS DAY is probably not the true anniversary of the Nativity; but Easter is certainly that of the Resurrection. The season is appropriate. In the climate of Palestine the first fruits of the harvest were ready at the Passover for presentation in the Temple. It was an agricultural as well as a historical festival; and the connection between that aspect of the feast and the Resurrection of our Lord is in the Apostle's mind when he says, in a subsequent part of this chapter, that Christ is "risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept."

In our colder climate the season is no less appropriate. The "life re-orient out of dust," which shows itself to-day in every bursting leaf-bud and springing flower, is Nature's parable of the spring that awaits man after the winter of death. No doubt, apart from

* Preached on Easter Sunday.

the resurrection of Jesus, the yearly miracle kindles sad thoughts in mourning hearts, and suggests bitter contrasts to those who sorrow, having no hope. But the grave in the garden has turned every blossom into a smiling prophet of the Resurrection.

And so the season, illuminated by the event, teaches us lessons of hope that "we shall not all die." Let us turn, then, this morning, to the thoughts naturally suggested by the day, and the great fact which it brings to each mind, and confirmed thereafter by the miracle that is being wrought round about us.

I.—First, then, in my text, I would have you note the facts of Paul's gospel.

"First of all . . . I delivered" these things. And the "first" not only points to the order of time in the proclamation, but to the order of importance as well. For these initial facts are the fundamental facts, on which all that may follow thereafter is certainly built. Now the first thing that strikes me here is that, whatever else the system unfolded in the New Testament is, to begin with, it is a simple record of historical fact. It becomes a philosophy, it becomes a religious system; it is a revelation of God; it is an unveiling of man; it is a body of ethical precepts. It is morals and philosophy and religion all in one; but it is, first of all, a story of something that took place in the world.

If that be so, there is a lesson for men whose work it is to preach it. Let them never forget that their business is to insist upon the truth of these great, supernatural, all-important, and fundamental facts, the death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They must evolve all the deep meanings that lie in

them; and the deeper they dig for their meanings the better. They must open out the endless treasures of consolation and enforce the omnipotent motives of action which are wrapped up in the facts; but howsoever far they may carry their evolving and their application of them, they will neither be faithful to their Lord nor true stewards of their message unless, clear above all other aspects of their work, and underlying all other forms of their ministry, there be the unfaltering proclamation—"first of all," midst of all, last of all—"how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," and "that He was raised again according to the Scriptures."

Note, too, how this fundamental and original character of the gospel which Paul preached, as a record of facts, makes short work of a great deal that calls itself "liberal Christianity" in these days. We are told that it is quite possible to be a very good Christian man, and reject the supernatural, and turn away with incredulity from the story of the resurrection. It may be so, but I confess that it puzzles me to understand how, if the fundamental character of Christian teaching be the proclamation of certain facts, a man who does not believe those facts has the right to call himself a Christian.

Note, further, how there is an element of explanation involved in the proclamation of the facts, which turns them into a gospel. Mark how "that *Christ* died," not *Jesus*. It is a great truth, that the man, our Brother, Jesus, passed through the common lot, but that is not what Paul says here, though he often says it. What he says is that "*Christ* died." Christ is the name of an office, into which is condensed a

whole system of truth, declaring that it is He who is the Apex, the Seal, and ultimate Word of all Divine revelation. It was the *Christ* that died; unless it was, the death of Jesus is no gospel.

"He died for our sins." Now, if the Apostle had only said "He died for us," that might conceivably have meant that in a multitude of different ways, by example, appeal to our pity and compassion and the like, His death was of use to mankind. But when he says "He died *for our sins*," I take leave to think that that expression has no meaning, unless it means that He died as the expiation and sacrifice for men's sins. I ask you, in what intelligible sense could Christ "die for our sins" unless He died as bearing their punishment and as bearing it for us? And then, finally, "He died and rose . . . according to the Scriptures," fulfilling the Divine purposes revealed from of old.

To the fact that a man was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem, "and rose again the third day," which is the narrative, there are added these three things—the dignity of the Person, the purpose of His death, the fulfilment of the Divine intention manifested from of old. And these three things, as I said, turn the narrative into a gospel.

So, brethren, let us remember that, without all three of them, the death of Jesus Christ is nothing to us, any more than the death of thousands of sweet and saintly men in the past has been, who may have seen a little more of the supreme goodness and greatness than their fellows, and tried in vain to make purblind eyes participate in their vision. Do you think that these twelve fishermen would ever have

shaken the world if they had gone out with the story of the Cross, unless they had carried along with it the commentary which is included in the words which I have emphasized? And do you suppose that the type of Christianity which slurs over the explanation, and so does not know what to do with the facts, will ever do much in the world, or will ever touch men? Let us liberalize our Christianity by all means, but do not let us evaporate it; and evaporate it we surely shall, if we falter in saying with Paul, "I declare, first of all, that which I received," namely, the death and resurrection of the Christ "for our sins, according to the Scriptures." These are the facts which make Paul's gospel.

II.—Now I ask you to look, in the second place, at what establishes the facts.

We have here, in this chapter, a statement very much older than our existing written gospels. This epistle is one of the four letters of Paul which nobody that I know of—with quite insignificant exceptions in modern times—has ever ventured to dispute. It is admittedly the writing of the Apostle, written before the Gospels, and in all probability within five-and-twenty years of the date of the Crucifixion. And what do we find alleged by it as the state of things at its date? That the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the subject of universal Christian teaching, and was accepted by all the Christian communities. Its evidence to that fact is undeniable; because there was in the early Christian Church a very formidable and large body of bitter antagonists of Paul's, who would have been only too glad to have convicted him, if they could, of any misrepresentation

of usual notion, or divergence from the usual type of teaching. So we may take it as undeniable that the representation of this chapter is historically true; and that, within five-and-twenty years of the death of Jesus Christ, every Christian community and every Christian teacher believed in and proclaimed the fact of the Resurrection.

But if that be so, we necessarily are carried a great deal nearer the Cross than five-and-twenty years; and, in fact, there is not, between the moment when Paul penned these words and the day of Pentecost, a single chink in the history where you can insert such a tremendous innovation as the full-fledged belief in a resurrection, coming in as something new.

I do not need to dwell at all upon this other thought, that, unless the belief that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead originated at the time of His death, there would never have been a Church at all. Why was it that they did not tumble to pieces? Take the nave out of the wheel and what becomes of the spokes? A dead Christ could never have been the basis of a living Church. If He had not risen from the dead, the story of His disciples would have been the same as that which Gamaliel told the Sanhedrim was the story of all former pseudo-Messiahs, such as that man Theudas. "He was slain and as many as followed him were dispersed and came to naught." Of course! The existence of the Church demands, as a pre-requisite, the initial belief in the Resurrection. I think, then, that the contemporaneousness of the evidence is sufficiently established.

What about its good faith? I suppose that nobody, now-a-days, doubts the veracity of these

witnesses. Anybody that knows an honest man when he sees him, anybody that has the least ear for the tone of sincerity and the accent of conviction, must say they may have been fanatics, they may have been mistaken, but one thing is clear as sunlight, they were not false witnesses for God.

What, then, about their competency? Their simplicity; their ignorance; their slowness to believe; their stupor of surprise when the fact first dawned upon them—which things they tell not with any idea of manufacturing evidence in their own favour, but simply as a piece of history—all tend to make us certain that there was no play of morbid imagination, no hysterical turning of a wish into a fact, on the part of these men. The sort of things that they say they saw and experienced are such as to make any such supposition altogether absurd. Long conversations, appearances appealing to more than one sense, appearances followed by withdrawals; sometimes in the morning; sometimes in the evening; sometimes at a distance, as on the mountain; sometimes close by, as in the chamber; to single souls and to multitudes. Fancy five hundred people all at once smitten with the same mistake, imagining that they saw what they did not see! Miracles may be difficult to believe; they are not half so difficult to believe as absurdities. And this modern explanation of the faith in the Resurrection I venture respectfully to designate as absurd.

But there is one other point to which I would like to turn for a moment; and that is that little clause in my text that "He was buried." Why does Paul introduce that amongst his facts? Possibly in order

to affirm the reality of Christ's death; but I think for another reason. If it be true that Jesus Christ was laid in that sepulchre, a stone's-throw outside the city gate, do you not see what a difficulty that fact puts in the way of disbelief or denial of His Resurrection? Since the grave—and it was not a grave, remember, like ours, but a cave, with a stone at the door of it, that anybody could roll away for entrance—since the grave was there, why, in the name of common sense, did not the rulers put an end to the pestilent heresy by saying, "Let us go and see if the body is in it"?

Modern deniers of the Resurrection may fairly be asked to front this thought—if Jesus Christ's body was in the sepulchre, how was it possible for belief in the Resurrection to have been originated or maintained? If His body was not in the grave, what had become of it? If His friends stole it away, then they were deceivers of the worst type in preaching a resurrection; and we have already seen that that hypothesis is ridiculous. If His enemies took it away, for which they had no motive, why did they not produce it, and say, "There is an answer to your nonsense! There is the dead man! Let us hear no more of this absurdity of His having risen from the dead"?

"He died . . . according to the Scriptures, and He was buried." And the angels' word carries the only explanation of the fact which it proclaims, "He is not here—He is risen."

I take leave to say that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is established by evidence which nobody would ever have thought of doubting, unless for the theory that miracles were impossible. The reason for dis-

belief is not the deficiency of the evidence, but the bias of the judge.

III.—And now I have no time to do more than touch the last thought. I have tried to show what establishes the facts. Let me remind you, in a sentence or two, what the facts establish.

I by no means desire to suspend the whole of the evidence for Christianity on the testimony of the eye-witnesses to the Resurrection. There are a great many other ways of establishing the truth of the Gospel besides that, upon which I do not need to dwell now. But, taking this one specific ground which my text suggests, what do the facts thus established prove?

Well, the first point to which I would refer, and on which I should like to enlarge, if I had time, is the bearing of Christ's resurrection on the acceptance of the miraculous. We hear a great deal about the impossibility of miracle and the like. It upsets the certainty and fixedness of the order of things, and so forth and so forth. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead; and that opens a door wide enough to admit all the rest of the Gospel miracles. It is of no use paring down the supernatural in Christianity in order to meet the prejudices of a quasi-scientific scepticism, unless you are prepared to go the whole length, and give up the Resurrection. There is the turning point. The question is, Do you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead; or do you not? If your objections to the supernatural are valid, then Christ is not risen from the dead; and you must face the consequences of that. If He is risen from the dead, then you must cease all your talk about the impossibility of miracle,

and be willing to accept a supernatural revelation as God's way of making Himself known to man.

But, further, let me remind you of the bearing of the Resurrection upon Christ's work and claims. If He be lying in some forgotten grave, and if all that fair thought of His having burst the bands of death is a blunder, then there was nothing in His death that had the least bearing upon men's sin, and it is no more to me than the deaths of thousands in the past. But if He be risen from the dead, then the Resurrection casts back a light upon the Cross, and we understand that His death is the life of the world, and that "by His stripes we are healed."

But, further, remember what He said about Himself when He was in the world—how He claimed to be the Son of God; how He demanded absolute obedience, implicit trust, supreme love; how He identified faith in Himself with faith in God—and consider the Resurrection as bearing on the reception or rejection of these tremendous claims. It seems to me that we are brought sharp up to this alternative—Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and was declared by the Resurrection to be the Son of God with power; or Jesus Christ has *not* risen from the dead—and what then? Then He was either deceiver or deceived, and in either case has no right to my reverence and my love. We may be thankful that men are illogical, and that many who reject the Resurrection retain reverence, genuine and deep, for Jesus Christ. But whether they have any right to do so is another matter. I confess for myself that, if I did not believe that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, I should find it very hard to accept, as an example of conduct,

or as religious teacher, a man who had made such great claims as He did, and had asked from me what He asked. It seems to me that He is either a great deal more, or a great deal less, than a beautiful saintly soul. If He rose from the dead He is much more; if He did not, I am afraid to say how much less He is.

And, finally, the bearing of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ upon our own hopes of the future may be suggested. It teaches us that life has nothing to do with organization, but persists apart from the body. It teaches us that a man may pass from death and be unaltered in the substance of his being; and it teaches us that the earthly house of our tabernacle may be fashioned like unto the glorious house in which He dwells now at the right hand of God. There is no other absolute proof of immortality but the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If we accept with all our hearts and minds Paul's Gospel in its fundamental facts, we need not fear to die, because He has died, and dying has been the death of death. We need not doubt that we shall live again, because He was dead and is alive for evermore. This Samson has carried away the gates on His strong shoulders, and death is no more a dungeon, but a passage. If we rest ourselves upon Him, then we can take up, for ourselves and for all that are dear to us and have gone before us, the triumphant song, "Oh! Death, where is thy sting?" "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

IV.

The Devout Heart Defying Death.*

"THEREFORE my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."—Ps. xvi. 9—11.

THE piteous tragedy of this last week is no doubt in all our thoughts this morning. Words are poor in the presence of such an instance of the ruthlessness of impartial Death. He aimed high and he struck surely. First fell that great ecclesiastic whose remarkable career and personality gave him such prominence and influence, and then one young head, over which gleamed a crown that was never to be worn, is laid low; and another, above which hung a bridal wreath that was never to rest upon her locks, is bowed in a sorrow which touches a nation's heart. But the more irresistible and awful is the power of that enemy who beats in with equal foot the door of the palace and of the cottage, the more needful is it for us to bethink ourselves how paltry a thing death is after all, and to learn its weakness and its limitations.

* Preached after the deaths of Cardinal Manning and the Duke of Clarence.

So I turn now to the words of this ancient singer whom we hear in my text in the very act of grasping, through his present religious experience, the great thought that his communion with God must be unbroken by anything that can befall him Let us listen to him, and see if we can catch something of his confident assurance.

I.—I would point out, first, the ground of this triumphant confidence.

My text begins with a "therefore," and that sends us back to what has preceded. What has gone before? The realization by faith, of the presence of God, and of the calm blessedness and stability of continual communion with Him. The Psalmist says: "Because I have set the Lord always before me, and feel that, He being with me, I cannot be moved, therefore I am sure that nothing can ever break this communion of mine with Him," or, to put the same thing into other words, the religious experiences of the devout life are of such a nature as to bring with them the calm, sweet assurance of their own immortality. Let us remember that these ancient saints had no such light as we have, streaming from the open grave of a Brother who Himself has died and lives in glory. But though they were thrown back upon their own present experience of religion to be a lamp for the darkness of the future, in a manner in which we are not, it still remains true that for us the evidence of the religious life to its own eternity is valid and powerful.

The capacity for communion with God surely bears witness that the man who has it is not born for death; and the exercise of that capacity is surely not the

least of the demonstrations of life persisting through and perfected by death. If, indeed, it was a mere piece of theological dogma that there was a life beyond the grave, then it would need to be commended by something other than the witness of our own devoutest and selectest moments. But if we are to translate a mere inoperative belief of the understanding into a living conviction that shall stay and solace the heart, there is no surer way of doing it than by passing here into the blessedness of communion with God Himself.

So, dear friends, though we have the objective proof of a future life, in the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and though that historical fact is the illuminating fact which brings life and immortality to light, there is needed for the conversion of intellectual belief into living confidence the witness of our own personal enjoyment of God and His sweetness, here and now, which will bring to us, as nothing else will, the calm assurance wherein our hearts may be glad, our spirits may rejoice, and our very flesh may rest safely. If you would be sure of a blessed future, make sure of a God-filled present. If we feel that He is "the strength of our hearts" here, we shall be sure that "He is our portion for ever." To him who can say "To me to live is Christ," it is impossible not to say, "And to die is gain."

The experiences of the devout life of earth are the witnesses, not to be silenced or gainsaid, of the perpetuity and the perfection of communion with God in Heaven.

II.—And so, secondly, note the contents of the Psalmist's triumphant confidence.

We have seen why he hoped; now let us look for a moment to that for which he hoped. I must ask you to allow me a word or two of explanation. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption," gives us the negative side of the blessedness of which he was sure. "Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore," gives its positive side.

Now as to that negative, I must just point out that in the original there is nothing about "leaving *in*." The language is "leave *to*," and that conveys an altogether different idea. It does not express the notion of a permission to descend for a time into *Sheol*, then to be recalled thence, but it expresses the idea of not being delivered at all to the power of that dark world.

Of course the expression here, "hell," is not to be taken in the limited sense which that terrible word has gradually gathered round itself as of a place of torment, but is the simple Hebrew representation of the dwelling-place of the dead as a great region, dim, shadowy; in which there was lived a feeble life that was scarcely worth calling life; where there was no praise of God, nor activity for Him, nor remembrance of His name; but pale shadows moved in a pale world.

And the latter clause of this verse does not, in the original, speak about "seeing corruption," but about "seeing the pit," as the margin of the Revised Version shows. Now "the pit" may either be a synonym for the under-world, which is spoken of in the previous clause, or it may mean "the grave." In either case to "see the pit" is the equivalent to the other expres-

sion, to "see death," which, again, is the equivalent to experiencing death, or to dying.

So, then, the Psalmist is not thinking about any resurrection of the body, as is often understood to be his meaning in these words; but is thinking, rather, that for him, by reason of his communion with God, death has really been abolished and become non-existent. The threatening shadow is swept clean out of his path.

But now, could any man, knowing the facts of human life, ever cherish such an expectation as that? Well, the answer, I think, is to be found in distinguishing between essence and form. The essence of the Psalmist's conviction and confidence was that his communion with God was unbroken and unbreakable, and, in the light of that great hope, the grim figure that stood before him thinned itself away to a film, through which the hope shone like a star through a cloud. How it was to be brought about he did not know; but this he did know, that he certainly was not going to die in such a fashion as to break his communion with God. There was trembling upon his lips the great word, "He that believeth shall never die." A new hope was swimming into his sky, a hope of unbroken life. And although its great round had not lifted itself clear above the horizon, the streaks of amber light still shot to the zenith, and prophesied the rising of a yet unrisen sun. Whatsoever may have been the obscurity that lay over his conceptions of his own future, this was clear to him—and this was the all-essential thing—that the contentment, the dependence, the stability, and immobility which he enjoyed in his communion with God had nothing in them

that Death could touch, and would run on unbroken for evermore.

You and I know how that is brought about, as he did not. But we may take the lesson, "Love is all, Death is nought, said he"; and may understand him better than he understood himself when he looked forward, and in the teeth of all experience declared his confidence that God would not abandon His Beloved to the darkness of the grave, nor that anything would ever break the bond that knit the Psalmist to His heart.

But though my text does not contemplate a Resurrection as a definite article of belief, resurrection is the logical result of the Psalmist's way of thinking. For, says he, "my flesh also shall rest secure." He believed, as the Bible teaches us throughout, that the perfection and completeness of humanity is body, soul, and spirit; or, as my text has it, in an analogous division, "heart, soul, and flesh." The overstrained spiritualism which pays no attention to the body, except as the clog and prison-house of the soul, has no footing in Scriptural representations, which rather declare that redemption is not complete until somehow the body shares in the "liberty of the glory of the sons of God." Therefore the perfection of humanity is to be found, not in any winding up of the spirit into lofty heights where the old humble companion and organ can never accompany it, but in the rising up of a perfected spirit and the investing of it with a body of glory—its fitting instrument, its joyous friend. "Corporeity is the end of God's ways with man." And if there be an unbroken life of communion for the devout soul, that draws after it

the certainty that there shall be a future life of glory for a body that wraps the spirit.

But turn now to the positive side of this triumphant confidence. "Thou wilt show me the path of life." That does not only mean a road which has life at the far end of it, but a road which is life all the way along, and leads to a more perfect and ultimate form thereof. The Psalmist is sure that, when the path dips down into any valley of the shadow of death, it is still a path of life. The great thought that the way to real life is through apparent death is all but ready for utterance, but it is not uttered. It waits for the time when, in the light of the open grave and the filled throne, it can be fully declared.

Then, mark the other portions of this triumphant, positive confidence, and their very remarkable and beautiful connection with what the Psalmist has been describing in the previous verses as his present experience. That connection is partially masked in our version; but I think only needs to be pointed out in order to be convincing. "Thou wilt show me the path of life," says he. And he had just said, "I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel." If we let Him counsel us here, He will lead us along the heavenly road of life hereafter. "In Thy presence," or "before Thee, is fulness of joy." And he had just said, "I have set the Lord always before me." If, amidst the distractions and temptations and obtrusive nothings of this life we steadfastly, by the effort of faith, set Jehovah before us, then, in His own time, reaching down His hand, He will lift us and set us before Him in the light of His face, and amidst the calm eternities of blessedness that fill the

heavens. "At Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." And he had just said, "He is at my right hand." If we bring Him, as we can if we will, to stand by our right hands as our Champion, our Guide, and the Breather of strength into our weakness, then at His own time He will bring us and set us at His right hand, where the Lord and Forerunner of our spirits is; and where, therefore, we, too, shall be. He is at our right hand whilst we fight; we are at His when we are crowned as victors. He is at our right hand whilst we tarry here below; we are at His when we dwell beside Him, gazing upon His face, the children of His right hand, the chosen of His love.

And so, dear brethren, the communion of earth, imperfect as it is, yields analogies, by the heightening and purifying of which we may construct for ourselves, some dim indeed, but reliable, visions of the blessedness of heaven. And they who here on earth know what it is to be in touch with God, to draw instruction and guidance from Him, and to realize the light of His face as pouring upon them even through the clouds and the mist, need but to enlarge their experiences, and to strip them of all their imperfections, in order to have a not altogether unworthy image of what makes heaven.

Especially the enlargement and perfecting of this earthly experience is to be looked for, says my text, in two directions. "The fulness of joy" is "in Thy presence." Limited joys are all that we have here. Not only all earthly joy is less than the capacity of our nature, but even the joys of the closest communion with God leave something to be desired,

and something possible to be imagined. We can always conceive a little more that might be. The vessel is never filled here. We drink, and they may be deep draughts, but still they are only, as it were, of brooks by the way. Yonder we shall be close by the fountain-head, and shall slake an immortal thirst, which shall never know the possibility of greater enjoyment at the moment, though each moment's full enjoyment will make a fuller possible in the moment thereafter. The incompleteness of earth shall be changed for the fulness of the heavens.

And, again, "at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." The word is the same as has been already used in the psalm, with a slight variation only of form. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places," and hereafter there are "pleasantnesses" that are eternal. The contrast, of course, is with the fleetingnesses of earthly joys. Yonder they are "for evermore," either in the sense that these delights do not cloy or cease to charm, nor do they perish, but rather increase with the using, or, as seems to be more properly the sense, that from Him there flow, in unbroken and eternal succession, grace for grace, gift for gift, one wave of felicity following the other like the sunlit ripples that press to the shore, and stretch away into the horizon, in one continual network of light that knows no end. So the communion of earth is heightened, expanded, made full, and made perpetual.

III.—I need only remind you, in a word, last of all, of the fulfilment of this triumphant confidence.

The Psalmist died. True, the essence of his hopes was fulfilled. True, too, the form of them was not.

He *did* "see the pit," because he did *not* "set the Lord always before him." His communion was incomplete, his immunity was therefore partial. The words, then, point to an ideal which the Psalmist strained after, and did not realize. They are prophetic, inasmuch as all the imperfections of ancient prophets, kings, and singers point onward to Him in whom they are fulfilled. And Jesus Christ, God's loved One, saw not the pit, though He passed into the grave, because in Him, and in Him alone, was realized in its completeness that life of communion which delivers from death.

But He having died and having risen, His death and His resurrection have completed that thinning away of the ghastly form of Death which is begun in the confidence of my psalm; and it is now true, literally true, that He has abolished death. For though there still remains the physical fact, all that makes it "death" is gone for him who trusts in Jesus Christ.

We then, with more triumphant confidence still than the Psalmist, may laugh in the face of the spectre, and bid defiance to his blunted darts. "Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead; and Thou sayest, If a man keep My saying he shall never see death. Whom makest Thou Thyself?" And the answer comes: "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" May we respond, "Yea, Lord! I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God!"

V.

Philip the Evangelist.

"But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea."—Acts viii. 40.

HE little that is known about Philip, the deacon and evangelist, may very soon be told. His name suggests, though by no means conclusively, that he was probably one of the so-called Hellenists, or foreign-born and Greek-speaking Jews. This is made the more probable because he was one of the seven selected by the Church, and after selection appointed by the apostles, to dispense relief to the poor. The purpose of the appointment being to conciliate the grumblers in the Hellenist section of the Church, the persons chosen would probably belong to it. He left Jerusalem during the persecution "that arose after the death of Stephen." As we know, he was the first preacher of the Gospel in Samaria; he was next the instrument honoured to carry the Word to the first heathen ever gathered into the Church; and then, after a journey along the sea-coast to Cæsarea, the then seat of government, he remained in that place in obscure

toil for twenty years, dropped out of the story, and we hear no more about him but for one glimpse of his home in Cæsarea.

That is all that is told of him. And I think that, if we note the contrast of the office to which men called him, and the work to which God set Him; and the other still more striking contrast between the brilliancy of the beginning of his course, and the obscurity of his long years of work, we may get some lessons worth the learning. I take, then, not only the words which I read for my text, but the whole of the incidents connected with this man as our starting-point now. And I draw from them two or three very well-worn, but none the less needful, pieces of instruction.

I.—First, then, we may gather a thought as to Christ's sovereignty in choosing His instruments.

Did you ever notice that events exactly contradicted the notion of the Church, and of the apostles, in the selection of Philip and his six brethren? The apostles said, "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Pick out seven relieving-officers; men who shall do the secular work of the Church, and look after the poor; and we will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." So said man. And what did facts say? That out of these twelve, who were to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, we never hear that by far the larger proportion of them were honoured to do anything worth mentioning for the spread of the Gospel. Their function was to be "witnesses"; and that was all. But, on the other hand, of the men that were supposed to be fitted for

secular work, two at all events had more to do in the expansion of the Church, and in the development of the universal aspects of Christ's Gospel, than the whole of the original group of apostles. So Christ picks His instruments. The apostles may say, "These shall do so-and-so; and we will do so-and-so." Christ says, "Stephen shall proclaim a wider gospel than the other twelve at first had caught sight of, and Philip shall be the first that shall go beyond the charmed circle of Judaism, and preach the Gospel."

It is always so. The Thuringian miner's son shall shake the Roman Church to its foundations; the Bedfordshire tinker shall write "Pilgrim's Progress"; the Northamptonshire cobbler shall be the first man to lay foreign missions upon the conscience of the modern Church. Christ chooses His instruments where He will; and it is not the apostles' business, nor the business of an ecclesiastic of any sort, to settle his own work or anybody else's. The Commander-in-Chief keeps the choosing of the men for special service in His own hand. The Apostolic College said, "Let *them* look after the poor and leave *us* to look after the ministry of the Word." Christ says, "Go and join thyself to that chariot," and speak there the speech that I shall bid thee.

Brethren, do you listen for that voice calling you to your tasks, and never mind what men may be saying. Wait till *He* bids, and you will hear Him speaking to you, if you will keep yourselves quiet. Wait till He bids you, and then be sure that you do His bidding. Christ chooses His instruments, and chooses them often in strange places.

II.—The next lesson that I would take from this

story is the spontaneous speech of a believing heart.

There came a persecution that scattered the Church. Men tried to fling down the lamp; and all that they did was to spill the oil, and it ran flaming wherever it went. For the scattered brethren, without any apostle with them, with no instruction given to them to do so, wherever they went carried their faith with them, and, as a matter of course, wherever they went they spoke their faith. And so we read that, not by appointment, nor of set purpose, nor in consequence of any ecclesiastical or official sanction, nor in consequence of any supernatural and distinct commandment from heaven, but just because it was the natural thing to do, and they could not help it, they went everywhere, these scattered men of Cyprus and Cyrene, preaching the Word.

And when this Philip, whom the officials had relegated to the secular work of distributing charity, found himself in Samaria, he did the like. The Samaritans were outcasts, and Peter and John had wanted to bring down fire from heaven to consume them. But Philip could not help speaking out the truth that was in his heart.

So it always will be; we can all talk about what we are interested in. The full heart cannot be condemned to silence. If there is no necessity for speech felt by a professing Christian, that professing Christian's faith is a very superficial thing. "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard,' said one of the apostles; thereby laying down the great charter of freedom of speech for all profound convictions. "Thy word was as a fire in my bones

when I said, I will speak no more in Thy name." So petulant and self-willed was I. "And I was weary with forbearing," and ashamed of my rash vow; "and I could not stay."

Dear friends, do you carry with you the impulse for utterance of Christ's name wherever you go? And is it so sweet in your hearts that you cannot but let its sweetness have expression by your lips? Surely, surely this spontaneous, instinctive utterance of this man, by which a living heart sought to relieve itself, puts to shame the "dumb dogs" that make up such an enormous proportion of professing Christians. And surely such an experience as his may well throw a very sinister light on the reality—nay! I will not say the *reality*, that would be too uncharitable, but upon the depth and vitality—of the profession of Christianity which these silent ones make.

III.—Another lesson that seems to me strikingly illustrated by the story with which we are concerned is the guidance of a Divine hand in common life, and when there are no visible or supernatural signs.

Philip goes down to Samaria because he must, and speaks because he cannot help it. He is next bidden to take a long journey, from the centre of the land, away down to the southern desert, and at a certain point there the Spirit says to him, "Go! join thyself to this chariot." And when his work with the Ethiopian statesman is done, then he is swept away by the power of the Spirit of God, as Ezekiel had been long before by the banks of the River Chabor, and is set down, no doubt all bewildered and breathless, at Azotus—the ancient Ashdod—the Philistine city, down on the low-lying coast. Was Philip less under Christ's

guidance when miracle ceased and he was left to ordinary powers? Did he feel as if deserted by Christ, because, instead of being swept by the strong wind of heaven, he had to tramp wearily along the flat shore, with the flashing Mediterranean reflecting the hot sunshine on his left hand? Did it seem to him as if his task in preaching the Gospel, in these villages through which he passed on his way to Cæsarea, was less distinctly obedience to the Divine command than when he heard the utterance of the Spirit, "Go down to the road which leads to Gaza, which is desert." By no means. To this man, as to every faithful soul, the guidance that came through his own judgment and common sense, through the instincts and impulses of his sanctified nature, by the circumstances which he devoutly believed to be God's providence, was as truly direct Divine guidance as if all the angels of heaven had blown the commandment with their trumpets into his waiting and stunned ears.

And so you and I have to go upon our paths without angel voices, or chariots of storm, and to be contented with Divine commandments less audible or perceptible to our senses than this man had, at one point in his career. But if we are wise we shall hear Him speaking the word. We shall not be left without His voice if we wait for it, stilling our own inclinations until His solemn commandment is made plain to us, and then stirring up our inclinations that they may sway us to swift obedience. There is no gulf, for the devout heart, between what is called miraculous and what is called ordinary and common. Equally in both doth God manifest His will to His servants, and equally in both is His presence capable

of realization. We do not need to envy Philip's brilliant beginning. Let us see that we imitate his quiet close of life.

IV.—The last lesson that I would draw is this—the nobility of persistence in unnoticed work.

What a contrast to the triumphs in Samaria, and the other great extension of the field for the Gospel, effected by the God-commanded preaching to the eunuch, is presented by the succeeding twenty years of altogether unrecorded, but faithful, toil! Persistence in such unnoticed work was made all the more difficult, and to any but a very true man would have been all but impossible, by reason of the contrast which such work offered to the glories of the earlier days. Some of us may have been tried in a similar fashion; all of us have more or less the same kind of difficulty to face. Some of us perhaps may have had gleams, at the beginning of our career, that seemed to give hope of fields of activity more brilliant and of work far better than we have ever had or done again, in the long weary toil of daily life. There may have been abortive promises, at the commencement of your careers, that seemed to say that you would occupy a more conspicuous position than life has had really in reserve for you. At any rate, we have all had our dreams, for

> "If Nature put not forth her power,
> About the opening of the flower,
> Who is there that could live an hour?"

And no life is all that the liver of it meant it to be when he began. We dream of building palaces or temples, and we have to content ourselves if we can put up some little shed in which we may shelter.

Philip, who began so conspicuously, and so suddenly ceased to be the special instrument in the hands of the Spirit, kept plod, plod, plodding on, with no bitterness of heart. For twenty years he had no share in the development of Gentile Christianity, of which he had sowed the first seed, but had to do much less conspicuous work. He toiled away there in Cæsarea patient, persevering, and contented, because he loved the work, and he loved the work because he loved Him that had set it. He seemed to be passed over by his Lord in His choice of instruments. It was he who was selected to be the first man that should preach to the heathen. But did you ever notice that Cornelius was not bid to apply to *Philip*, who was probably in Cæsarea at the time, but to send to Joppa for the Apostle Peter? Philip might have sulked, and said: "Why was I not chosen to do this work? I will speak no more in this Name."

It did not fall to his lot to be the apostle to the Gentiles. One who came after him was preferred before him, and the Hellenist Saul was set to the task which might have seemed naturally to belong to the Hellenist Philip. He too might have said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." No doubt he did say it in spirit, with noble self-abnegation and freedom from jealousy. He cordially welcomed Paul to his house in Cæsarea twenty years afterwards, and rejoiced that one sows and another reaps; and so the division of labour is the multiplication of gladness.

A beautiful superiority to all the low thoughts that are apt to mar our persistency in unobtrusive and unrecognised work is set before us in this story. There are many temptations to-day, dear brethren,

what with gossiping newspapers and other means of publicity for everything that is done, for men to say, "Well, if I cannot get any notice for my work I shall not do it."

Boys in the street will refuse to join in games, saying, "I shall not play unless I am captain, or have the big drum." And there are not wanting Christian men who lay down like conditions. "Play well thy part," whatever it is. Never mind the honour. Do the duty God appoints, and He that has the two mites of the widow in His treasury will never forget any of our works, and at the right time will tell them out before His Father, and before the holy angels.

VI.

The Martyrdom of James.

"Herod killed James, the brother of John, with the sword."—Acts xii. 2.

ONE might have expected more than a clause to be spared, to tell the death of a chief man and the first martyr amongst the apostles. James, as we know, was one of the first group of the apostles who were in especial close connection with Jesus Christ. He is associated in the Gospels with Peter and his brother John, and is always named before John, as if he were the more important of the two by reason of age or of other circumstances unknown to us. But yet we know next to nothing about him. In the Acts of the Apostles he is a mere lay figure; his name is only mentioned in the catalogue at the beginning, and here again in the brief notice of his death. This reticence and the merely incidental character of the notice of his martyrdom are sufficiently remarkable. I think the lessons of the fact, and of the, I was going to say, slight way in which the writer of this book refers to it, may perhaps be most pointedly brought out if we take four con-

trasts—James and Stephen, James and Peter, James and John, James and James.

I.—First, then, James and Stephen.

Look at the different scale on which the deaths of these two are told: the martyrdom of the one is beaten out over chapters, the martyrdom of the other is crammed into a corner of a sentence. And yet, of the two men, the one who is the less noticed filled the larger place officially, and the other was only a simple deacon and preacher of the Word. The fact that Stephen was the first Christian to follow his Lord in martyrdom is not sufficient to account for the extraordinary difference. The difference is to be sought for in another direction altogether. The Bible cares so little about the people whom it names because its true theme is the works of God, and not of man; and the reason why the "Acts of the Apostles" kills off one of the first three apostles in this fashion is simply that, as the writer tells us, his theme is "all that *Jesus*" continued "to do and to teach" after He was taken up. Since it is Christ who is the true actor, it matters uncommonly little what becomes of James or of the other ten. This book is *not* the "Acts of the Apostles," but it is the Acts of Jesus Christ.

I might suggest, too, in like manner, that there is another contrast which I have not included in my four, between the scale on which the death of Jesus Christ is told by Luke, and that on which this death is narrated. What is the reason why so disproportionate a space of the Gospel is concerned with the last two days of our Lord's life on earth? What is the reason why years are leaped over in silence and

moments are spread out in detail, but that the death of a man is only a death, but the death of the Christ is the life of the world?

It is little needful that we should have poetical, emotional, picturesque descriptions of martyrdoms and the like in a book which is altogether devoted to tracking the footsteps of Christ in history; and which regards men as nothing more than the successive instruments of His purpose, and the depositories of His grace.

Another lesson which we may draw from the reticence in the one case, and the expansiveness in the other, that of the protomartyr of the Church, is that of a wise indifference to the utterly insignificant accident of posthumous memory or oblivion, of us and our deeds and sufferings. James sleeps none the less sweetly in his grave, or, rather, wakes none the less triumphantly in heaven, because his life and death are both so scantily narrated. If we "self-infold the large results" of faithful service, we need not trouble ourselves about its record on earth.

But another lesson which may be learned from this cursory notice of the apostle's martyrdom is—how small a thing death really is! Looked at from beside the Lord of life and death, which is the point of view of the author of this narrative, "great death" dwindles to a very little thing. We need to revise our notions if we would understand how trivial it really is. To us it frowns like a black cliff blocking the upper end of our valley; but there is a path round its base, and though the throat of the pass be narrow, it has room for us to get through, and up to the sunny uplands beyond. From a mountain top the country below

seems level plain, and what looked like an impassable precipice has dwindled to be indistinguishable. The triviality of death, to those who look upon it from the heights of eternity, is well represented by these brief words which tell of the first breach thereby in the circle of the apostles.

II.—There is another contrast, James and Peter.

Now this chapter tells of two things: one, the death of one of that pair of friends; the other, the miracle that was wrought for the deliverance of the other from death. Why could not the parts have been exchanged, or why could not the miraculous hand that was stretched out to save the one fisherman of Bethsaida have been put forth to save the other? Why should James be slain, and Peter miraculously delivered? A question easily asked; a question not to be answered by us. We may say that the one was more useful for the development of the Church than the other. But we have all seen lives that, to our poor vision, seemed to be all but indispensable, ruthlessly swept away, and lives that seemed to be, and were, perfectly profitless, prolonged to extreme old age. We may say that maturity of character, development of Christian graces, made the man ready for glory But we have all seen men struck down when anything but ready; and men left for the blessing of mankind many, many a day after they were far fitter for heaven than thousands that, we hope, have gone there.

So all these little explanations do not go down to the bottom of the matter, and we are obliged just to leave the old question in the loving hands that hold life and death for us all. Only we may be sure of this

that James was as dear to Christ as Peter was, and that there was no greater love shown in sending the angel that delivered the one from the "expectation of Herod" and the people of the Jews, than was shown in sending the angel that stood behind the headsman, and directed the stroke of the fatal sword on the neck of the other.

The one was as dear to Christ as the other—aye, and the one was as surely, and more blessedly, delivered "from the mouth of the lion" as the other was, though the one seemed to be crushed by his powerful jaws, and the other seemed to be dragged from his teeth. James escaped from Herod when Herod slew him, but could not make him unfaithful to his Master, and his deliverance was not less complete than the deliverance of his friend.

But let us remember, too, that if thus, to two equally beloved, there are dealt out these two different fates, it must be because that evil, which, as I said, is not so great as it looks, is also not so bitter as it tastes. There is no real evil, for the loving heart, in the stroke that breaks its bands and knits it to Jesus Christ. If we are Christians, the deepest desire of our souls is fuller communion with our Lord. We obtain that, in some stunted and scanty measure, by life; but, oh! is it not strange that we should shrink from that change which will enable us to possess it fully and eternally? The contrast of James and Peter may teach us the equal love that presides over the life of the living and the death of the dying.

III.—Another contrast is that of James and John.

The close union and subsequent separation by this

martyrdom, of that pair of brothers is striking and pathetic. They seem to have pursued their humble trade of fishermen together, in the little fishing village of Bethsaida, apparently as working partners with their father Zebedee. They were not parted by their discipleship, as was the sad fate of many a brother delivered by a brother to death. If we may attach any weight to the suggestion that the expression in John's narrative, "He first findeth *his own* brother, Simon," implies that "the other disciple" did the same by *his* brother, James was brought to Jesus by John, and new tenderness and strength were thereby given to their affection. They were closely associated in their apostleship, and were together the companions of Jesus in the chief incidents of His life. They were afterwards united in the leadership of the Church. By death they were separated so far: the one, the first of all the Apostles to "become a prey to Satan's rage," the other, "lingering out his fellows all," and "dying in bloodless age," probably a hundred years old and more, and looking back through all the long parting to the brother who had joined with him in the wish that even Messiah's Kingdom should not part them, and yet had been parted so soon and parted so long.

Ah! may we not learn the lesson that we should recognize the mercy and wisdom of the ministry of Death the Separator, and should tread with patience the lonely road, do calmly the day's work, and tarry till He comes, though those that stood beside us are gone. We may look forward with the assurance that "God keeps a niche in Heaven to hide our idols; and albeit He breaks them to our face," yet shall we

find them again, like Memnon's statue, vocal in the rising sunshine of the heavens.

The brothers, so closely knit, so soon parted, so long separated, at last are reunited. Even to us here, with the chronology of earth still ours, the years between the early martyrdom of James and the death of the centenarian John seem but a span. The lapse of the centuries that have rolled away since then makes the difference of the dates of the two deaths seem very small, even to us. What a mere nothing it will have looked to them, joined together once more beford God!

IV.—Lastly, James and James. In his hot youth, when he deserved the name of a son of thunder —so energetic, boisterous, destructive perhaps, he was—he and his brother, and their foolish mother, whose name is kindly not told us, go to Christ and say, "Grant that we may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left, in Thy Kingdom." That was what he wished and hoped for, and what he got was years of service, and a taste of persecution, and finally the swish of the headsman's sword.

Yes! And so our dreams are disappointed, and their disappointment is often the road to their fulfilment, for Jesus Christ was answering the prayer, "Grant that we may sit on Thy right hand in Thy Kingdom," when He called James to Himself, by the brief and bloody passage of martyrdom. James said, when he did not know what he meant—and the vow was noble though it was ignorant—"we can drink of the cup that Thou drinkest." And, all honour to him! he stuck to his vow; and when the cup was proffered to him, he manfully, and like a Christian,

took it and drank it to the dregs; and, I suppose, went silently to his grave. But the change between his ardent anticipations and his calm resignation, and between his foolish dream and the stern reality, may well teach *us* that, whether our wishes be fulfilled or disappointed, they all need to be purified, and that the disappointment of them on earth is often God's way of fulfilling them for us in higher fashion than we dreamed or asked.

So, brethren, let us leave to Him for ourselves, and for all dear ones, that question of living or dying. Only let us be sure that, whether our lives be long like John's, or short like James's, "living or dying we are the Lord's." And then, whatever be the length of life or the manner of death, both will bring us the fulfilment of our highest wishes, and will lead us to His side, at whose right hand all those shall sit who have loved Him here, and, though long parted, shall be re-united in common enjoyment of the pleasures for evermore which bloom unfading there. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

VII.

Whose Image and Superscription?

"WHOSE image and superscription hath it?"—LUKE xx. 24.

IT is no unusual thing for antagonists to join forces in order to crush a third person obnoxious to both. So in this incident we have an unnatural alliance of the two parties in Jewish politics who were at daggers drawn. The representatives of the narrow conservative Judaism, which loathed a foreign yoke, in the person of the Pharisees and Scribes, and the Herodians, the partizans of a foreigner, and a usurper, lay their heads together to propose a question to Christ which they think will discredit or destroy Him. They would have answered their own question in opposite ways. One would have said, "It *is* lawful to give tribute to Cæsar", the other would have said, "It is *not*." But that is a small matter when malice prompts. They calculate, "If He says, No! we will denounce Him to Pilate as a rebel. If He says, Yes! we will go to the people and say, Here is a pretty Messiah for you, that has no objection to the foreign yoke. Either way we shall end Him."

Jesus Christ serenely walks through the cobwebs, and lays His hand upon the fact. "Let Me see a silver penny!"—which, by-the-bye, was the amount of the tribute—"Whose head is that?" The currency of the country proclaims the monarch of the country. To stamp his image on the coin is an act of sovereignty. "Cæsar's head declares that you are Cæsar's subjects, whether you like it or not, and it is too late to ask questions about tribute when you pay your bills in his money." "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

Does not the other side of Christ's answer—"to God the things that are God's"—rest upon a similar fact? Does not the parallelism require that we should suppose that the destiny of things to be devoted to God is stamped upon them, whatever they are, at least as plainly as the right of Cæsar to exact tribute was inferred from the fact that his money was the currency of the country? The thought widens out in a great many directions, but I purpose to confine it to one special line of contemplation now, and to take it as suggesting to each of us this great truth, that the very make of men shows that they belong to God, and are bound to yield themselves to Him. If the answer to the question was plain, and the conclusion irresistible, about the penny with the image of Tiberius, the answer is no less plain, nor the conclusion less irresistible, when we turn the interrogation within, and, looking at our own being, say to ourselves, "Whose image and superscription hath *it?*"

I.—First, then, note the image stamped upon man, and the consequent obligation.

We can very often tell what a thing is for by noticing its make. The instructed eye of an anatomist will, from a bone, divine the sphere in which the creature to whom it belonged was intended to live. Just as plainly as gills or lungs, fins, wings, or legs and arms, declare the element in which the creature that possesses them is intended to move, so plainly do our spirits show that God is our Lord since we are made in a true sense in His image, and therefore only in Him can we find rest.

I need not remind you, I suppose, of the old word, "Let us make man in our own image." Nor need I, I suppose, insist at any length upon the truth that though, by the fact of man's sin, the whole glory and splendour of the Divine image in which he was made are marred and defaced, there still remain such solemn, blessed, and awful resemblances between man and God that there can be no mistake as to which beings in the universe are the most kindred; nor any misunderstanding as to Who it is after whose likeness we are formed, and in Whose love and life alone we can be blessed.

I am not going to weary you with thoughts for which, perhaps, the pulpit is not the proper place; but let me just remind you of one or two points. Is there any other being on this earth that can say of itself "I am"? God says "*I am that I am.*" You and I cannot say that, but we alone, in this order of things, possess that solemn and awful gift, the consciousness of personal being. And, brethren, whoever is able to say to himself "I am" will never know rest until he can turn to God and say "Thou art," and then, laying his hand in the Great Father's

hand, venture to say "*We* are." We are made in His image, in that profoundest of all senses.

But to come to something less recondite. We are like God in that we can love; we are like Him in that we can perceive the right, and that the right is supreme; we are like Him in that we have the power to say "I will." And these great capacities demand that the creature who thus knows himself to be, who thus knows the right, who thus can love, who thus can purpose, resolve, and act, should find his home and his refuge in fellowship with God.

But if you take a coin, and compare it with the die from which it has been struck, you will find that wherever in the die there is an elevation, in the coin there is a sunken place; and conversely. So there are not only resemblances in man to the Divine nature, which bear upon them the manifest marks of his destiny, but there are correspondences, wants, on our side, met by gifts upon His; hollow emptiness in us filled, when we are brought into contact with Him, by the abundance of His outstanding supplies and gifts. So the poorest, narrowest, meanest life has in it a depth of desire, an ardour, and sometimes a pain and a madness of yearning and longing, which nothing but God can fill. Though we often misunderstand the voice, and so make ourselves miserable by vain efforts, our "heart and our flesh," in every fibre of our being, "cry out for the living God." And what we all want is some one Pearl of great price into which all the dispersed preciousnesses and fragmentary brilliances that dazzle the eyes shall be gathered. We want a Person, a living Person, a present Person, a sufficient Person, who shall satisfy

our hearts, our whole hearts, and that at one and the same time, or else we shall never be at rest.

Because, then, we are made dependent, because we possess these wild desires, because immortal thirst attaches to our nature, because we have consciences that need illuminating, wills that are only free when they are absolutely submissive, hearts that are dissatisfied and left yearning, after all the sweetnesses of limited, transient, and creatural affections, we bear on our very fronts the image of God; and any man that wisely looks at himself can answer the question, "Whose image and superscription hath it?" in but one way. "In the image of God created He him."

Therefore by loving fellowship, by lowly trust, by ardour of love, by submissiveness of obedience, by continuity of contemplation, by the sacrifice of self, we must yield ourselves to God, if we would pay the tribute manifestly owing to the Emperor, by the fact that His image and superscription are upon the coin.

II.—And so let me ask you to look, in the next place, at the defacement of the image and the false expenditure of the coin.

You sometimes get into your hands money on which there has been stamped, by mischief, or for some selfish purpose, the name of someone else than the king's or queen's which surrounds the head upon it. And in like manner our nature has gone through the stamping-press again, and another likeness has been deeply imprinted upon it. The image of God, which every man has, is in some senses and aspects ineffaceable by any conduct of his. But in another aspect it is not like the permanent similitude stamped upon the solid metal of the penny, but

rather, like the reflection, that falls upon some polished plate, or that is cast upon the white sheet from a lantern. If the polished plate is rusty and stained, the image is faint and indistinct; if it is turned away from the light the image passes. And that is what some of you are doing. By living to yourselves, by living day in and day out without ever remembering God, by yielding to passions, lusts, ambitions, low desires, and the like, you are doing your very best to scratch out the likeness which still lingers in your nature. Is there anyone here that has yielded to some lust of the flesh, some appetite, drunkenness, gluttony, impurity, or the like, and has so sold himself to it as that one part of the Divine image, the power of saying "I will," has pretty nearly gone? I am afraid there must be some who, by long submission to passion, have lost the control that reason and conscience and a firm, steady purpose ought to give. Is there any man here who, by long course of utter neglect of the Divine love, has ceased to feel that there is a heart at the centre of the universe, or that He has anything to do with it? Brethren, the awful power that is given to men of degrading themselves till, lineament by lineament, the likeness in which they are made vanishes, is the saddest and most tragical thing in the world. "Like the beasts that perish," says one of the psalms, the men become who, by the acids and files of worldliness and sensuality and passion, have so rubbed away the likeness of God that it is scarcely perceptible in them. Do I speak to some such now? If there is nothing else left there is this—a hunger for absolute good and for the satisfaction of your

desires. That is part of the proof that you are made for God, and that only in Him can you find rest.

All occupation of heart and mind and will and active life with other things, to the exclusion of supreme devotion to God, is, then, sacrilege and rebellion. The emperor's head was the token of sovereignty, and carried with it the obligation to pay tribute. Every fibre in your nature protests against the prostitution of itself to anything short of God. You remember the story in the Old Testament about that saturnalia of debauchery, the night when Babylon fell, when Belshazzar, in the very wantonness of godless insolence, could not be satisfied with drinking his wine out of anything less sacred than the vessels that had been brought from the Temple at Jerusalem. That is what many of us are doing, taking the sacred cup which is meant to be filled with the wine of the Kingdom, and pouring into it the foaming but poisonous beverages which steal away our brains and make us drunk, the moment before our empire totters to its fall and we to our ruin. "All the consecrated things of the house of the Lord they dedicated to Baal," says one of the narratives in the Book of Chronicles. That is what some of us are doing, taking the soul that is meant to be consecrated in God and find its blessedness there, and offering it to false gods in whose service there is no blessedness.

For, dear friends, I beseech you, lay this to heart, that you cannot thus use the Godlike being that you possess, without bringing down upon your heads miseries and unrest. The raven, that black bird of evil omen, went out from the Ark, and flew homeless over the weltering ocean. The souls that seek not

God fly thus, strangers and restless, through a drowned and lifeless world. The dove came back with an olive branch in its beak. Souls that are wise, and have made their nests in the sanctuary, can fold their wings and be at peace there. As the ancient saint said, "We are made for God, and only in God have we rest." "Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to me, then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." Cannot you see the blessed, gentle gliding of the full stream through the meadows, with the sunshine upon its ripples? Such is the heart that has yielded itself to God. In solemn contrast to that lovely image, the same prophet has, for a repeated refrain in his book, "the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest," but goes moaning round the world, and breaking in idle foam upon every shore, and still is unquiet for evermore. Brethren, only when we render to God the thing that is God's—our hearts and ourselves—have we repose.

III.—Now, lastly, notice the restoration and perfecting of the defaced image.

Because man is like God, it is possible for God to become like man. The possibility of Revelation and of Redemption by an incarnate Saviour depend upon the reality of the fact that man is made in the image of God. Thus there comes to us that Divine Christ, who "lays His hand upon both," and being the express image of His person, so that He can say "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," "was in all points made like unto His brethren," with only the exception that the defacement which had obliterated the Divine image in

them left it clear, untarnished, and sharply cut in Him.

Therefore, because Jesus Christ has come, our Brother, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," made like unto us, and in our likeness presenting to us the very image of God and eradiation of His light, therefore no defacement that it is possible for men or devils to make on this poor humanity of ours need be irrevocable and final. All the stains may be blotted out, all the usurping superscriptions may be removed and the original imprint restored. The dints may be elevated, the bulges may be lowered, the tarnish and the rust may be rubbed off, and, fairer than before, the likeness of God may be stamped on every one of us, "after the image of Him that created us," if only we will turn ourselves to that dear Lord, and cast our souls upon Him. Christ hath become like us that we might become like Him, and therein be partakers of the Divine nature. "We all, reflecting as a glass does the glory of the Lord, may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory."

Nor do the possibilities stop there, for we look forward to a time when, if I might pursue the metaphor of my text, the coinage shall be called in and reminted, in new forms of nobleness and of likeness. We have before us this great prospect, that "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"; and in all the glories of that heaven we shall partake, for all that is Christ's is ours, and we that "have borne the image of the earthly shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

I come to you, then, with this old question: "Whose image and superscription hath it?" and the

old exhortation founded thereupon: "Render therefore to God the thing that is God's"; and yield yourselves to Him. Another question I would ask, and pray that you may lay it to heart, "To what purpose is this waste?" "What are you doing with the silver penny of your own soul?" "Wherefore do ye spend it for that which is not bread?" Give yourselves to God; trust yourselves to the Christ who is like you, and like Him. And, resting upon His great love, you will be saved from the prostitution of capacities, and the vain attempts to satisfy your souls with the husks of earth; and whilst you remain here will be made partakers of Christ's life, and growingly of His likeness, and, when you remove yonder, your body, soul, and spirit will be conformed to His image, and transformed into the likeness of His glory, "according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself."

VIII.

How to Work the Work of God.

"Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."—John vi. 28, 29.

THE feeding of the five thousand was the most "popular" of Christ's miracles. The evangelist tells us, with something between a smile and a sigh, that "when the people saw *it*, they said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world," and they were so delighted with Him, and with it, that they wanted to get up an insurrection on the spot, and make a King of Him. I wonder if there are any of that sort of people left. If two men were to come into Manchester to-morrow morning, and one of them were to offer material good, and the other wisdom and peace of heart, which of them, do you think, would have the larger following? We need not cast a stone at the unblushing, frank admiration that these men had for a Prophet who could feed them, for that is exactly the sort of prophet that a great number of Englishmen would like best, if they spoke out.

So Jesus Christ had to escape from the inconvenient enthusiasm of these mistaken admirers of His; and they followed Him in their eagerness, but were met with words which lifted them into another region and damped their zeal. He tried to turn away their thoughts from the miracle to a far loftier gift. He contrasted the trouble which they willingly took in order to get a meal with their indifference as to obtaining the true bread from heaven, and He bade them work for it just as they had shown themselves ready to work for the other.

They put to Him this question of my text, so strangely blending, as it does, right and wrong, "You have bid us work; tell us how to work? What must we do that we may work the works of God?" Christ answers, in words that illuminate their confusions, and clear the whole matter, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

I.—Faith, then, is a work.

You know that the commonplace of evangelical teaching opposes faith to works; and the opposition is perfectly correct, if it be rightly understood. But I have a strong impression that a great deal of our preaching goes clean over the heads of our hearers, because we take for granted, and they fancy, that they understand the meaning of terms because the terms themselves are so familiar. And I believe that many people go to churches and chapels all their lives long, and hear this doctrine dinned into them, that they are to be saved by faith, and not by works, and yet never have a definite understanding of what it all means.

So let me just for a moment try to clear up the

terms of this apparently paradoxical statement, faith is work. What do we mean by faith? What do you mean by saying that you have faith in your friend, in your wife, in your husband, in your guide? You simply mean, and we mean, that you trust the person, grasping him by the act of trust. On trust the whole fabric of human society depends, as well as, in another aspect of the same expression, does the whole fabric of Manchester commerce. Faith, confidence, the leaning of myself on one discerned to be true, trusty, strong, sufficient for the purpose in hand, whatever it may be—that, and nothing more mysterious, nothing further away from daily life and the common emotions which knit us to one another, is, as I take it, what the New Testament means when it insists upon faith.

Ah! we all exercise it. We put it forth on certain low levels and directions. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her," is, I have no doubt, the short summary of the happy lives of many in this place now. Have you none of that confidence to spare for God? Is it all meant to be poured out upon weak, fallible, changeful creatures like ourselves, and none of it to rise to the One in whom absolute confidence may eternally be fixed?

But then, of course, as we may see by the exercise of the same emotion in regard to one another, the under side of this confidence in God or Christ is diffidence of myself. There is no real exercise of confidence which does not involve, as an essential part of itself, the going out from myself in order that I may lay all the weight and responsibility of the matter in hand upon him in whom I trust. And so Christian faith is

compounded of these two elements, or rather, it has these two sides which correspond to one another. The same figure is convex or concave according as you look at it from one side or another. If you look at faith from the one side, it rises towards God; if from the other, it hollows itself out into a great emptiness. And so the under side of faith is distrust; and he that puts his confidence in God thereby goes out of himself, and declares that in himself there is nothing to rest upon.

Now that two-sided confidence and diffidence, trust and distrust, which are one, is truly a work. It is not an easy one either; it is the exercise of our own inmost nature. It is an effort of will. It has to be done by coercing ourselves. It has to be maintained in the face of many temptations and difficulties. The contrast between faith and work is between an inward emotion and a crowd of outward performances. But the faith which knits me to God is my act, and I am responsible for it.

But yet it is not a work, just because it is a ceasing from my own works, and going out from myself that He may enter in. Only remember, when we say, "Not by works of righteousness, but by the faith of Christ," we are but proclaiming that the inward man must exercise that act of self-abnegation and confession of its own impotence, and ceasing from all reliance on anything which it does, whereby, and whereby alone, it can be knit to God. "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto eternal life. . . . This is the work of God, that ye believe." You are responsible for doing that, or for not doing it.

II.—Secondly, faith, and not a multitude of separate acts, is what pleases God.

Mark the difference between the form of the question and that of the answer. The people say, "What are we to do that we may work the *works* of God?" Christ answers in the singular. "This is the *work*." They thought of a great variety of observances and deeds. He gathers them all up into one. They thought of a pile, and that the higher it rose the more likely they were to be accepted. He unified the requirement, and He brought it all down to this one act, in which all other acts are included, and on which alone the whole weight of a man's salvation is to rest. "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" is a question asked in all sorts of ways, by the hearts of men all round about us; and what a babble of answers come! The priest says, "Rites and ceremonies." The thinker says, "Culture, education." The moralist says, "Do this, that, and the other thing"; and enumerates a whole series of separate acts. Jesus Christ says, "One thing is needful. . . . This is the work of God." He brushes away the sacerdotal answer, and the answer of the mere moralist, and He says, "No! Not *do;* but *trust*." In so far as that is act, it is the only act you need.

That is evidently reasonable. The man is more than his work; motive is more important than action; character is deeper than conduct. God is pleased, not by what men do, but by what men are. We must *be* first, and then we shall *do*. And it is obviously reasonable, because we can find analogies to the requirement in all other relations of life. What

would you care for a child that scrupulously obeyed, and did not love or trust? What would a prince think of a subject that was ostentatious in acts of loyalty, and all the while was plotting, and nurturing treason in his heart?

If doing separate acts of righteousness is the way to work the works of God, then no man has ever done them. For it is a plain fact that every man falls below his own conscience—which conscience is less scrupulous than the Divine law. The worst of us know a great deal more than the best of us; and our lives, universally, are, at the best, lives of partial effort after unreached attainments of obedience and of virtue.

But even supposing that we could perform, far more completely than we do, the requirements of our own consciences, and conform to the evident duties of our position and relations, do you think that without faith we should be therein working the works of God? Suppose a man were able fully to realize his own ideal of goodness, without any confidence in God underlying all his acts; do you think that these would be acts that would please God? It seems to me that, however lovely and worthy of admiration, looked at with human eyes only, many lives are, which have nobly and resolutely fought against evil, and struggled after good, if they have lacked the crowning grace of doing this for God's sake they lack, I was going to say, almost everything. I will not say that, but I will say they lack that which makes them acceptable, well-pleasing to Him. The poorest, the most imperfect realization of our duty and ideal of conduct, which has in it a love towards God and a faith in Him that

would fain do better if it could, is a nobler thing, I venture to say, in the eyes of Heaven—which are the truth-seeing eyes—than the noblest achievements of an untrusting soul. It does not seem to me that that is bigotry or narrowness or anything else but the plain deduction from the truths, that a man's relation to God is the deepest thing about him, and that if that be right, other things will come right, and if that be wrong, nothing is as right as it might be.

Here we have Jesus Christ laying the foundation for the doctrine which is often said to be Pauline, as if that meant something else than coming from Jesus Christ. We often hear people say, "Oh! your evangelical teaching of justification by faith, and all that, comes out of Paul's epistles, not out of Christ's teaching, nor out of John's Gospel." Well! There *is* a difference, which it is blindness not to recognize, between the seeds of teaching in our Lord's word, and the flowers and fruit of these seeds, which we get in the more systematized and developed teaching of the epistles. I frankly admit that, and I should expect it, with my belief as to who Christ is, and who Paul is. But in that saying "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent," is the germ of everything that Paul has taught us about the works of the law being of no avail, and faith being alone and unfailing in its power of uniting men to God, and bringing them into the possession of eternal life. The saying stands in John's Gospel. And so Paul and John alike received, though in different fashions, and wrought out on different lines of subsequent teaching, the germinal impulse from these words of the Master. Let us hear no more about salvation by faith being a

Pauline addition to Christ's Gospel, for the lips of Christ Himself have declared "this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

III.—Thirdly, this faith is the productive parent of all separate works of God.

The teaching that I have been trying to enforce has, I know, been so presented as to make a pillow for indolence, and to be closely allied to immorality. It has been so presented. It has not been so presented half as often as its enemies would have us believe. For I know of but very few, and those by no means the most prominent and powerful of the preachers of the great doctrine of salvation by faith, who have not added, as its greatest teacher did: "Let ours also be careful to maintain good works for necessary uses." But the true teaching is not that trust is a substitute for work, but that it is the foundation of work. The Gospel command is, first of all, trust; then, set yourselves to do the works of faith. Faith works by love, it is the opening of the heart to the entrance of the life of Christ, and, of course, when that life comes in, it will act in the man in a manner appropriate to its origin and source, and he that by faith has been joined to Jesus Christ, and has opened his heart to receive the life of Christ, will, as a matter of course, bring forth, in the measure of his faith, the fruits of righteousness.

We are surely not despising fruits and flowers when we insist upon the root from which they shall come. A man may take separate acts of partial goodness, as you see children in the springtime sticking daisies on the spikes of a thorn-twig picked from the hedges. But these will die. The basis of all righteousness is

faith, and the manifestation of faith is practical righteousness. "Show Me thy faith by thy works" is Christ's teaching quite as much as it is the teaching of His sturdy servant, James. And so, dear friends, we are going by the direct road to enrich lives with all the beauties of possible human perfection when we say, "Begin at the beginning. The longest way round is the shortest way home; trust Him with all your hearts first, and that will effloresce into whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report." In the beautiful metaphor of the Apostle Peter, in his second Epistle, Faith is the damsel who leads in the chorus of consequent graces; and we are exhorted to "add to our faith virtue," and all the other that unfold themselves in harmonious sequence from that one central source.

If I had time I should be glad to turn for a moment to the light which such considerations cast upon subjects that are largely occupying the attention of the Christian Church to-day. I should like to insist that, before you talk much about applied Christianity, you make very sure that in men there *is* a Christianity to apply. I venture to profess my own humble belief that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred Christian ministers and churches will do most for the social, political, and intellectual and moral advancement of men and the elevation of the people by sticking to their own work and preaching this Gospel: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

IV.—Lastly, this faith secures the bread of life.

That bread of life is the starting-point of the whole conversation. In the widest possible sense it is what-

soever truly stills the hunger of the immortal soul. In a deeper sense, it is the person of Jesus Christ Himself, for He not only says that He will *give*, but that He *is* the Bread of Life. And, in the deepest sense of all, it is His flesh broken for us in His sacrifice on the cross. That bread is a gift. So the paradox results which stands in our text—*work* for the bread which God will *give*. If it be a gift, that fact determines what sort of work must be done in order to possess it. If it be a gift, then the only work is to accept it. If it be a gift, then we are out of the region of *quid pro quo;* and have not to bring, as Chinamen do in trading, great strings of copper cash that, all added up together, do not amount to a shilling, in order to buy what God will bestow upon us. If it be a gift, then to trust the giver and to accept the gift are the only conditions that are requisite.

It is not a condition that He has invented out of His own head, so to speak. The necessity of it is lodged deep in the very nature of the case. Air cannot get to the lungs of a mouse in an air-pump. Light cannot come into a room where all the shutters are up and the keyhole stopped. If a man pleases to perch himself on some little stool of his own, with glass legs to it, and to take away his hand from the conductor, no electricity will come to him. If I choose to lock my lips, Jesus Christ does not prise open my clenched teeth to put the bread of life into an unwilling mouth. If we ask we receive; if we take we possess.

And so the paradox comes about, that we work for a gift, with a work which is not work, because it is a departure from self. It is the same blessed paradox

which the prophet spoke when he said, "Buy . . . without money and without price." Oh! what a burden of hopeless effort and weary toil—like that of the man that had to roll the stone up the hill, which ever slipped back again—is lifted from our shoulders, by such a word as this that I have been poorly trying to speak about now. "Thou art careful and troubled about many things," poor soul! trying to be good; trying to fight yourself, and the world, and the devil. Try the other plan, and listen to Him saying "Give up self-imposed effort in thine own strength. Take, eat, this is My body, which is broken for you."

IX.

The Gift and the Giver.

"JESUS answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."—JOHN iv. 10.

HIS Gospel has two characteristics seldom found together; deep thought and vivid character drawing. Nothing can be more clear cut and dramatic than the scene in the chapter before us. There is not a word of description of this Samaritan woman. She paints herself, and it is not a beautiful picture. She is apparently of the peasant class, from a little village nestling on the hill above the plain, come down in the broiling sunshine to Jacob's well. She is of mature age, and has had a not altogether reputable past. She is frivolous, ready to talk with strangers, with a tongue quick to turn grave things into jests; and yet she possesses, hidden beneath masses of unclean vanities, a conscience and a yearning for something better than she has, which Christ's words awoke, and which were finally so enkindled as to make her fit to receive the full declaration of His Messiahship, with which Pharisees and priests could not be trusted.

I need scarcely do more than remind you of the way in which the conversation between this strangely-assorted pair began. The solitary Jew, sitting spent with travel on the well, asks for a draught of water; not in order to get an opening for preaching, but because He needs it. She replies with an exclamation of light wonder, half a jest and half a sarcasm, and challenging a response in the same tone.

But Christ lifts her to a higher level by the words of my text, which awed levity, and prepared for a fuller revelation. "Thou dost wonder that I, being a Jew, ask drink of thee, a Samaritan. If thou knewest who I am, thy wonder at My asking would be more. If thou knewest what I have to give, we should change places, and thou wouldest ask, and I should bestow."

So, then, we have here gift, Giver, way of getting, and ignorance that hinders asking. Let us look at these.

I.—First, the gift of God. Now it is quite clear that our Lord means the same thing, whatever it may be, by the two expressions, the "gift of God" and the "living water." For, unless He does, the whole sequence of my text falls to pieces. "Living water" was suggested, no doubt, by the circumstances of the moment. There, in the well, was an ever-springing source, and, says He, a like supply, ever welling up for thirsty lips and foul hands, ever sweet and ever sufficient, God is ready to give.

We may remember how, all through Scripture, we hear the tinkle of these waters as they run. The force of the expression is to be gathered largely from the Old Testament and the uses of the metaphor there.

It has been supposed that by the "living water" which God gives is here meant some one specific gift, such as that of the Holy Spirit, which sometimes is expressed by the metaphor. Rather I should be disposed to say the "living water" is eternal life. "With Thee is the fountain of life." And so, in the last resort, the gift of God is God Himself. Nothing else will suffice for us, brethren. We need Him, and we need none but Him.

Our Lord, in the subsequent part of this conversation, again touches upon this great metaphor, and suggests one or two characteristics, blessings, and excellences of it. "It shall be *in* Him." It is something that we may carry about with us in our hearts, inseparable from our being, free from all possibility of being filched away by violence, being rent from us by sorrows, or even being parted from us by death. What a man has outside of him he only seems to have. Our only real possessions are those which have passed into the substance of our souls. All else we shall leave behind. The only good is inward good; and this water of life slakes our thirst, because it flows into the deepest place of our being, and abides there for ever.

Oh! you that are seeking your satisfaction from fountains that remain outside of you after all your efforts, learn that every one of them, by reason of their externality, will sooner or later be "broken cisterns that can hold no water." And I beseech you, if you want rest for your souls, and stilling for their yearnings, look for it there, where only it can be found, in Him, who not only dwells in the heavens to rule and to shower down blessings, but enters into the waiting heart and abides there, the inward, and there-

fore the only real, possession and riches. "It shall be in him a fountain of water."

"It springs up"—with an immortal energy, with ever fresh fulness, by its own inherent power, needing no pumps nor machinery, but ever welling forth its refreshment, an emblem of the joyous energy and continual freshness of vitality, which is granted to those who carry God in their hearts, and therefore can never be depressed beyond measure, nor ever feel that the burden of life is too heavy to bear, or its sorrows too sharp to endure.

It springs up "into eternal life," for water must seek its source, and rise to the level of its origin, and this fountain within a man, that reaches up ever towards the eternal life from which it came, and which it gives to its possessor, will bear him up—as some strong spring will lift the clods that choked its mouth—towards the eternal life which is native to it, and therefore native to him.

Brethren, no man is so poor, so low, so narrow in capacity, so limited in heart and head, but that he needs a whole God to make him restful. Nothing else will. To seek for satisfaction elsewhere is like sailors in their desperation, when the water-tanks are empty, slaking their thirst with the treacherous blue that washes cruelly along the battered sides of their ship. A moment's alleviation is followed by the recurrence in tenfold intensity of the pangs of thirst, and by madness, and death. Do not drink the salt water that flashes and rolls by your side, when you can have recourse to the fountain of life that is with God.

"Oh!" you say, "commonplace, threadbare, pulpit

rhetoric." Yes. Do you live as if it were true? It will never be too threadbare to be dinned into your ears, until it has passed into your lives and regulated them.

II.—Now, in the next place, notice the Giver.

Jesus Christ blends in one sentence, startling in its boldness, the gift of God, and Himself as the Bestower. This Man, exhausted for want of a draught of water, speaks with parched lips a claim most singularly in contrast with the request which He had just made: "I will give thee the living water." No wonder that the woman was bewildered, and could only say, "The well is deep, and Thou hast nothing to draw with." She might have said, "Why then dost Thou ask me?" The words were meant to create astonishment, in order that the astonishment might awaken interest, and thus lead to the capacity for further illumination. Suppose you had been there, had seen the Man whom she saw, had heard the two things that she heard, and knew no more about Him than she knew, what would *you* have thought of Him and His words? Perhaps you would have been more contemptuous than she was. See to it that, since you know so much that explains and warrants them, you do not treat Him worse than she did.

Jesus Christ claims to give God's gifts. He is able to give to that poor, frivolous, impure-hearted and impure-lived woman, at her request, the eternal life, which shall still all the thirst of her soul, that had often in the past been satiated and disgusted, but had never been satisfied by any of its draughts.

And He claims that, in this giving, He is something more than a channel, because, says He, "If thou

hadst asked of Me I would give thee." We sometimes think of the relation between God and Christ as being typified by that of some land-locked sea amidst remote mountains, and the affluent that brings its sparkling treasures to the thirsting valley. But Jesus Christ is no mere vehicle for the conveyance of a Divine gift, but His own heart, His own power, His own love are in it; and it is His gift just as much as it is God's.

Now I do not do more than pause for one moment to ask you to think of what inference is necessarily involved in such a claim as this. If we know anything about Jesus Christ at all, we know that He talked in this tone, not occasionally but habitually. It will not do to pick out other bits of His character or actions and admire these and ignore *the* characteristic of His teachings—His claims for Himself. And I have only this one word to say, if Jesus Christ ever said anything the least like the words of my text, and if they were not true, what was He but a fanatic that had lost His head in the fancy of His inspiration? And if He said these words and they *were* true, what is He *then*? What but that which this Gospel insists from its beginning to its end that He was—the Eternal Word of God, by whom all Divine revelation from the beginning has been made, and who at last "became flesh" that we might "receive of His fulness," and therein "be filled with all the fulness of God"? Other alternative I, for my part, see none.

But I would have you notice, too, the connection between these human needs of the Saviour and His power to give the Divine gift. Why did He not simply say to this woman, "If thou knewest who I

am?" Why did He use this periphrasis of my text, "Who is it that saith unto thee, 'Give me to drink'"? Why but because He wished to fix her attention on the startling contradiction between His appearance and His claims? On the one hand He asserts Divine prerogative, on the other He forces into prominence human weakness and necessity, because these two things, human weakness and Divine prerogative, are in Him inseparably braided together and intertwined. Some of you will remember the great scene in Shakespeare where the weakness of Cæsar is urged as a reason for rejecting his imperial authority:—

> "Ay! and that tongue of his, that bade the Romans
> Mark him, and write his speeches in their books,
> Alas! it cried, 'Give me some drink, . . .'
> Like a sick girl."

And the inference that is drawn is, How can he be fit to be a ruler of men? But we listen to our Cæsar and Emperor, when He asks this woman for water, and when He says on the cross, "I thirst," and we feel that these are not the least of His titles to be crowned with many crowns. They bring Him nearer to us, and they are the means by which His love reaches its end, of bestowing upon us all, if we will have it, the cup of salvation. Unless He had said the one of these two things, He never could have said the other. Unless the dry lips had petitioned, "Give Me to drink," the gracious lips could never have said, "I will give thee living water." Unless, like Jacob of old, this Shepherd could say, "In the day the drought consumed Me," it would have been impossible that the flock "shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more, . . . for the Lamb that is

in the midst of the throne shall lead them to living fountains of water."

III.—Again, notice how to get the gift.

Christ puts together, as if they were all but contemporaneous, "thou wouldst have asked of Me," and "I would have given thee." The hand on the telegraph transmits the message, and back, swift as the lightning, flashes the response. The condition, the only condition, and the indispensable condition, of possessing that water of life, the summary expression for all the gifts of God in Jesus Christ, which at the last are essentially God Himself, is the desire to possess it, turned to Jesus Christ. Is it not strange that men should not desire? is it not strange and sad that such foolish creatures are we that we do not want what we want; that our wishes and needs are often diametrically opposite? All men desire happiness, but some of us have so vitiated our tastes and our palates by fiery intoxicants, that the water of life seems utterly tasteless and unstimulating, and so we will rather go back again to the delusive, poisoned drinks than glue our lips to the river of God's pleasures.

But it is not enough that there should be the desire. It must be turned to Him. In fact, the asking of my text, so far as you and I are concerned, is but another way of designating the great key-word of personal religion, faith in Jesus Christ. For they who ask know their necessity, are convinced of the power of him to whom they appeal to grant their requests, and rely upon his love to do so. And these three things, the sense of need, the conviction of Christ's ability to save and to satisfy, and of His infinite love that desires to make us blessed—these three things fused

together make the faith which receives the gift of God.

Remember, brethren, that another of the Scriptural expressions for the act of trusting in Him is *taking*, not asking. You do not need to ask, as if for something that is not provided. What we all need to do is to open our eyes to see what is there, if we like to put out our hands and take it. Why should we be saying, "Give me to drink," when a pierced hand reaches out to us the cup of salvation, and says, "Drink ye all of it"? Ho, everyone that "thirsteth, come . . . and drink . . . without money and without price."

There is no other condition but desire, turned to Christ, and that is the necessary condition. God cannot give men salvation, as veterinary surgeons drench unwilling horses—forcing the medicine down their throats through clenched teeth. There must be the opened mouth, and wherever there is, there will be the full supply. "Ask, and ye shall receive;" take, and ye shall possess.

IV.—Lastly, mark the ignorance that prevents asking.

Jesus Christ looked at this poor woman and discerned in her—though, as I said, it was hidden beneath mountains of folly and sin—a thirsty soul that was dimly longing for something better. And He believed that, if once the mystery of His being and the mercy of God's gifts were displayed before her, she would melt into a yearning of desire that is certain to be fulfilled. In some measure the same thing is true of us all. For surely, surely, if only you saw realities, and things as they are, some of you would not be

content to continue as you are—without this water of life. Blind! blind! blind! are the men who grope at noonday as in the dark and turn away from Jesus. If you knew, not with the head only, but with the whole nature—if you knew the thirst of your soul, the sweetness of the water, the readiness of the Giver, and the dry and parched land to which you condemn yourselves by your refusal, surely you would bethink yourself, and fall at His feet and ask, and get, the water of life.

But, brethren, there is a worse case than ignorance; there is the case of people who know and refuse, not by reason of imperfect knowledge, but by reason of averted will. And I beseech you to ponder whether that may not be your condition. "Whosoever *will*, let him come." "Ye *will* not come unto Me that ye might have life." I do not think I venture much when I say that I am sure there are people hearing me now, not Christians, who are as certain, deep down in their hearts, that the only rest of the soul is in God, and the only way to get it is through Christ, as any saint of God's ever was. But the knowledge does not touch their will, because they like poison and they do not want life.

Oh! dear friends, the instantaneousness of Christ's answer, and the certainty of it, are as true for each of us as they were for this woman. The offer is made to us all, just as it was to her. We can gather round that Rock like the Israelites in the wilderness, and slake every thirst of our souls from its out-gushing streams. Jesus Christ says to each of us, as He did to her, tenderly, warningly, invitingly, and yet

rebukingly, "If thou knewest . . . thou wouldst ask, . . . and I would give."

Take care lest, by continual neglect, you force Him at last to change His words, and to lament over you, as He did over the city that He loved so well, and yet destroyed. "If thou *hadst* known in thy day the things that belong to thy peace. But now they are hid from thine eyes."

X.

Christ at the Door.

"BEHOLD! I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."—REV. iii. 20.

MANY of us are familiar, I dare say, with the devoutly imaginative rendering of the first part of these wonderful words, which we owe to the genius of a living painter. In it we see the fast shut door, with rusted hinges, all overgrown with rank, poisonous weeds, which tell how long it has been closed. There stands, amid the night dews and the darkness, the patient Son of Man, one hand laid on the door, the other bearing a light, which may perchance flash through some of its chinks. In His face are love repelled and pity all but wasted; in the touch of His hand are gentleness and authority.

But the picture pauses, of course, at the beginning of my text, of which the sequel is quite as wonderful as its first part. "I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me." What can surpass such words as these? I venture to take this great text, and ask you to look with me at the three things that lie in it:

the suppliant for admission; the door opened; the entrance and the feast.

I.—Think, then, first of all, of that Suppliant for admission.

I suppose that the briefest explanation of my text is sufficient. Who knocks? The exalted Christ. What is the door? The closed heart of man. What does He desire? Entrance. What are His knockings and His voice? All providences; all monitions of His Spirit in man's spirit and conscience; the direct invitations of His written or spoken word; in brief, whatsoever sways our hearts to yield to Him and enthrone Him. This is the meaning, in the fewest possible words of the great utterance of my text.

Here is a revelation of a universal truth applying to every man and woman on the face of the earth; but more especially and manifestly to those of us who live within the sound of Christ's Gospel, and of the written revelations of His grace. True, my text was originally spoken in reference to the unworthy members of a little church of early believers in Asia Minor, but it passes far beyond the limits of the lukewarm Laodiceans to whom it was addressed. And the "any man" which follows is wide enough to warrant us in stretching out the representation as far as the bounds of humanity extend, and in believing that, wherever there is a close heart there is a knocking Christ, and that all men are lightened by that Light which came into the world.

Upon that I do not need to dwell, but I desire to enforce the individual bearing of the general truth upon our own consciences, and to come to each with

this message—the saying is true about thee, and at the door of thy heart Jesus Christ stands, and there His gentle, mighty hand is laid, and on it the flashes of His light shine, and through the chinks of the unopened door of thy heart comes the beseeching voice, "Open! Open unto Me." A strange reversal of the attitudes of the great and of the lowly, of the giver and of the receiver, of the Divine and of the human! Christ once said, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." But He has taken the suppliant's place, and, standing by the side of each of us, He beseeches us that we let Him bless us, and enter in for our rest.

So, then, there is here a revelation, not only of a universal truth, but a most tender and pathetic disclosure of Christ's yearning love to each of us. What do you call that emotion which, more than anything else, desires that a heart should open and let it enter? We call it love when we find it in one another. Surely it bears the same name when it is sublimed into all but infinitude, and yet is as individualizing and specific as it is great and universal, as it is found in Jesus Christ. If it be true that He wants me, if it be true that in that great heart of His there are a thought and a wish about His relation to me, and mine to Him, then, then, each of us is grasped by a love that is like our human love, only perfected and purified from all its weaknesses.

Now we sometimes feel, I am afraid, as if all that talk about the love which Jesus Christ has to each of us was scarcely a prose fact. There is a woeful lack of belief among us in the things that we profess to believe most. You are all ready to admit, when I

preach it, that it is true that Jesus Christ loves us. Have you ever tried to realize it, and lay it upon your hearts, that the sweetness and astoundingness of it may soak into you, and change your whole being? Oh! listen, not to my poor, rough notes, but to His infinitely sweet and tender melody of voice, when He says to you, as if your eyes needed to be opened to perceive it, "*Behold!* I stand at the door and knock."

There is a revelation in the words, dear friends, of an infinite long-suffering and patience. The door has long been fastened; you and I have, like some lazy servant, thought that, if we did not answer the knock, the Knocker would go away when He was weary. But we have miscalculated the elasticity and the unfailingness of that patient Christ's love. Rejected He abides; spurned He returns. There are men and women in this chapel now who, all their lives long, have known that Jesus Christ coveted their love, and yearned for a place in their hearts, and have steeled themselves against the knowledge, or frittered it away by worldliness, or darkened it by sensuality and sin. And here they are again once more brought into the presence of that rejected, patient, wooing Lord, who courts them for their souls as if they were, which indeed they are, too precious to be lost, as long as there is a ghost of a chance that they may still listen to His voice. The patient Christ's wonderfulness of long-suffering may well bow us all in thankfulness and in penitence. How often has He tapped or thundered at the door of your heart, dear friends, and how often have you neglected to open? Is it not of the Lord's mercies that the rejected or neglected love is offered you once more, and the voice, so long

deadened and deafened to your ears by the rush of passion, and the hurry of business, and the whispers of self, yet again appeals to you, as it does even through my poor translation of it.

And then, still further, in that thought of the suppliant waiting for admission, there is the explanation for us all of a great many misunderstood facts in our experience. That sorrow that darkened your days and made your heart bleed, what was it but Christ's hand on the door? Those blessings which pour into your life day by day "beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye yield yourselves living sacrifices." That unrest which dogs the steps of every man who has not found rest in Christ, what is it but the application of His hand to the obstinately closed door? The stings of conscience, the movements of the Spirit, the definite proclamation of His Word, even by such lips as mine, what are they all except His appeals to us? And this is the deepest meaning of joys and sorrows, of gifts and losses of fulfilled and disappointed hopes. This is the meaning of the yearning of Christless hearts, of the various experiences which come to us all. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock." If we understood better that all life is guided by Christ, and that Christ's guidance of life is guided by His desire that He should find a place in our hearts, we should less frequently wonder at sorrows, and should better understand our blessings.

The boy Samuel, lying sleeping before the light in the inner sanctuary, heard the voice of God, and thought it was only the grey-bearded priest that spoke. We often make the same mistake, and confound the utterances of Christ Himself with the speech of men.

Recognize who it is that pleads with you; and do not fancy that when Christ speaks it is Eli that is calling; but say, "Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth." "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in."

II.—And that leads me, secondly, to ask you to look at the door opened.

I need not enlarge upon what I have already suggested, the universality of the wide promise here—"If *any* man open the door"; but what I wish rather to notice is that, according to this representation, "the door" has no handle outside, and is so hinged that it opens from within outwards. Which, being taken out of metaphor and put into fact, means this, you are the only being that can open the door for Christ to come in. The whole responsibility, brother, of accepting or rejecting God's gracious Word, which comes to us all in good faith, lies with yourself.

I am not going to plunge into theological puzzles, but I appeal to consciousness. You know as well as I do—better a great deal, for it is *yourself* that is in question—that at each time when your heart and conscience have been brought in contact with the offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, if you had liked you could have opened the door, and welcomed His entrance. And you know that nobody and nothing kept it fast except only yourselves. "Ye *will* not come to Me," said Christ, "that ye might have life." Men, indeed, do pile up such mountains of rubbish against the door that it cannot be opened, but it was they who put them there; and they are responsible if the hinges are so rusty that they will

not move, or the doorway is so clogged that there is no room for it to open. Jesus Christ knocks, but Jesus Christ cannot break the door open. It lies in your hands to decide whether you will take or whether you will reject that which He brings.

The door is closed, and unless there be a definite act on your parts it will not be opened and He will not enter. So we come to this, that to do nothing is to keep your Saviour outside; and that is the way in which most men that miss Him do miss Him.

I suppose there are very few of us who have ever been conscious of an act of resistance, by which, if I might adhere to the metaphor, we have laid hold of the door on the inside, and held it tight lest it should be opened. But, I fear me, there are many of my present hearers who have sat in the inner chamber, and heard the gracious hand on the outer panel, and have kept their hands folded and their feet still, and done nothing. Ah! brethren, to do nothing is to do the most dreadful of things, for it is to keep the door shut in the face of Christ. No passionate antagonism is needed, no vehement rejection, no intellectual denial of His truth and His promises. If you want to ruin yourselves, you have simply to do nothing! All the dismal consequences will necessarily follow.

"Well," you say, "but you are talking metaphors; let us come to plain facts. What do you wish me to do?" I wish you to listen to the message of an infinitely loving Christ who died on the cross to bear the sins of the whole world, including you and me; and who now lives, pleading with each of us from heaven that we will take by simple faith, and keep by holy obedience, the gift of eternal life which He

offers, and which He alone can give. The condition of His entrance is simple trust in Him, as the Saviour of my soul. That is opening the door, and if you will do that, then, just as when you open the shutters, in comes the sunshine; just as when men lift the sluice, in flows the crystal stream into the slimy, empty lock, so—I was going to say by gravitation, rather by the diffusive impulse that belongs to Light, which is Christ—He will enter in, wherever He is not shut out by unbelief and aversion of will

III.—And so that brings me to my last point—viz., the entrance and the feast.

My text is a metaphor, but the declaration that "if any man open the door" Jesus Christ "will come *in to him*," is not a metaphor, but is the very heart and centre of the Gospel. "I will come in to him," dwell in him, be really incorporated in his being or inspirited, if I may so say, in his spirit. Now you may think that that is far too recondite and lofty a thought to be easily grasped by ordinary people, but its very loftiness should recommend it to us I, for my part, believe that there is no more literal fact in the whole world than the actual dwelling of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is in heaven, in the spirits of the people that love Him and trust Him. And this is one great part of the Gospel that I have to preach to you, that into our emptiness He will come with His fulness; that into our sinfulness He will come with His righteousness; that into our death He will come with His triumphant and immortal life; and, He being in us and we in Him, we shall be full and pure and live for ever, and be blessed with the blessedness of Jesus. So remember that

imbedded in the midst of the wonderful metaphor of my text lies the fact which is the very centre of the Gospel hope, the dwelling of Jesus Christ in the hearts even of poor sinful creatures like us.

But it comes into view here only as the basis of the subsequent promises, and on these I can only touch very briefly, "I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me." That speaks to us in lovely, sympathetic language, of a close, familiar, happy communication between Christ and my poor self, which shall make all life as a feast in company with Him. We remember who is the mouthpiece of Jesus Christ here. It is the disciple who knew most of what quietness of blessedness and serenity of adoring communion there were in leaning on Christ's breast at supper, casting back his head on that loving bosom; looking into those deep, sad eyes, and asking questions which were sure of answer. And John, as he wrote down the words "I will sup with him, and he with Me," perhaps remembered that upper room where, amidst all the bitter herbs, there were such strange joy and tranquillity. But whether he did or no, may we not take the picture as suggesting to us the possibilities of loving fellowship, of quiet repose, of absolute satisfaction of all desires and needs, which will be ours, if we open the door of our hearts by faith, and let Jesus Christ come in?

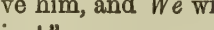
But, note, when He does come He comes as guest. "I will sup with him." "He shall have the honour of providing that of which I partake." Just as upon earth He said to the Samaritan woman, "Give Me to drink," or sat at the table, at the modest village feast in Bethany, in honour of the miracle of a man raised

from the dead, and smiled approval of Martha serving, as of Lazarus sitting at table, and of Mary anointing Him, so the humble viands, the poor man's fare that our resources enable us to lay upon His table, are never too small or poor for Him to delight in. This King feasts in the neatherd's cottage, and He will even condescend to turn the cakes. "I will sup with him." We cannot bring anything so coarse, so poor, so unworthy, if a drop or two of love has been sprinkled over it, but that it will be well-pleasing in His sight, and He Himself will partake thereof. "He has gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner."

But more than that, where He is welcomed as guest, He assumes the place of host. "I will sup with him, and *he with Me*." You remember how, after the Resurrection, when the two disciples, moved to hospitality, implored the unknown stranger to come in and partake of their humble fare, He yielded to their importunity, and, when they were in the guest-chamber, took His place at the head of the table, and blessed the bread and gave it to them. Your remember how, in the beginning of His miracles, He manifested forth His glory in this, that, invited as a common guest to the rustic wedding, He replenished the failing wine. And so, wherever a poor man opens his heart and says, "Come in, and I will give Thee my best," Jesus Christ comes in, and gives the man *His* best, that the man may render it back to Him. He owes nothing to any man, He accepts the poorest from each, and He gives the richest to each. He is Guest and Host, and what He accepts from us is what He has first given to us.

The promise of my text is fulfilled immediately when the door of the heart is opened, but it shadows and prophesies a nobler fulfilment in the heavens. Here and now Christ and we may sit together, but the feast will be like the Passover, eaten with loins girt and staves in hand, and the Red Sea and wilderness waiting to be trodden. But there comes a perfecter form of the communion, which finds its parallel in that wonderful scene when the weary fishers, all of whose success had depended on their obedience to the Master's direction, discerned at last, through the grey of the morning, who it was that stood upon the shore, and, struggling to His side, saw there "a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread," to which they were bidden to add their modest contribution in the fish that they had caught; and, the meal being thus prepared partly by His hand and partly by theirs, enabled and filled by Him, His voice says, "Come and dine." So, brethren, Christ at the last will bring His servants to His table in His Kingdom, and there their works shall follow them; and He and they shall sit together for ever, and for ever "rejoice in the fatness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple."

I beseech you, listen not to my poor voice, but to His that speaks through it, and when He knocks do you open, and Christ Himself shall come in. "If a man love Me he will keep My commandments, and My Father will love him, and *We* will come and make Our abode with him!"



XI.

Excuses not Reasons.

"THEY all with one consent began to make excuse."—LUKE xiv. 18

ESUS CHRIST was at a feast in a Pharisee's house It was a strange place for Him—and His words at the table were also strange. For He first rebuked the guests, and then the host; telling the former to take the lower rooms and bidding the latter widen his hospitality to those that could not recompense him. It was a sharp saying; and one of the other guests turned the edge of it by laying hold of our Lord's final words, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just," and saying, no doubt in a pious tone and with a devout shake of the head, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." It was a very proper thing to say, but there was a ring of conventional, commonplace piety about it which struck unpleasantly on Christ's ear. He answers the speaker with that strange story of the great feast that nobody would come to, as if He had said, "You pretend to think that it is a blessed thing to eat bread in the Kingdom of God. Why! You will not eat the bread when it is offered to you."

I daresay you all know enough of the parable to make it unnecessary for me to go over it. A great feast is prepared; invitations, more or less general, are sent out at first, everything is ready; and, behold, there is a table, and nobody to sit at it. A strange experience for a hospitable man! And so he sends his servants to beat up the unwilling guests, and, one after another, with more or less politeness, refuses to come.

I need not follow the story further; in the latter part of the parable our Lord shadows the transference of the blessings of the Kingdom to the Gentiles, outcasts as the Jews thought them, skulking in the edges and tramping on the highways. In the first part He foreshadows the failure of His own preaching amongst His own people. But Jews and Englishmen are very much alike. The way in which these invited guests treated the invitation to this feast is being repeated, day by day, by thousands of men round us; and by some within these walls now. "They all, with one consent, began to make excuse."

I.—The first thing that I would desire you to notice is the strangely unanimous refusal.

The guests' conduct in the story is such as life and reality would afford no example of. No set of people, asked to a great banquet, would behave as these people in the parable do. Then, is the introduction of such an unnatural trait as this a fault in the construction of the narrative? No! Rather it is a beauty, for the very point of the story is the utter unnaturalness of the conduct described, and the contrast that is presented between the way in which men regard the lower blessings which these people are

represented as turning from, and in which they regard the loftier blessings that are offered. Nobody would turn his back upon such a banquet if he had the chance of going to it. What, then, shall we say of those who, by platoons and regiments, turn their backs upon this higher offer? The very preposterous unnaturalness of the conduct, if the parable were a true story, points to the deep meaning that lies behind it: that in that higher region the unnatural is the universal, or all but universal.

And, indeed, it is so. One would almost venture to say that there is a kind of law according to which the more valuable a thing is the less men care to have it; or, if you like to put it into more scientific language, the attraction of an object is in the inverse ratio to its worth. Small things, transitory things, material things, everybody grasps at; and the number of graspers steadily decreases as you go up the scale in preciousness until, when you reach the highest of all, there are the fewest that want them. Is there anything lower than good that merely gratifies the body? Is there anything that the most of men want more? Are there many things lower in the scale than money? Are there many things that pull more strongly? Is not truth better than wealth? Are there more pursuers of it than there are of the latter? For one man that is eager to know, and counts his life well spent in following knowledge—

> "Like a sinking star,
> Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,"

there are a hundred that think it rightly expended in the pursuit after the wealth that perishes. Is not goodness higher than truth, and are not the men that

are content to devote themselves to becoming wise more numerous than those that are content to devote themselves to becoming pure? And, topmost of all, is there anything to be compared with the gifts that are held out to us in that great Saviour and in His message? And is there anything that the mass of men pass by with more unanimous refusal than the offered feast that the great King of humanity has provided for His subjects? What is offered for each of us, pressed upon us, in the gift of Jesus Christ? Help, guidance, companionship, restfulness of heart, power of obedience, victory over self, control of passions, supremacy over circumstances, tranquillity deep and genuine, death abolished, heaven opened, measureless hopes following upon perfect fruition, here and hereafter. These things are all gathered into, and their various sparkles absorbed in, the one steady light of that one great encyclopædiacal word—salvation. These gifts are going begging, lying at our doors, offered to every one of us, pressed upon all, on the simple condition of taking Christ for Saviour and King. And what do we do with them? "They all, with one consent, began to make excuses."

One hears of barbarous people who have no use for the gold that abounds in their country, and do not think it half as valuable as glass beads. That is how men estimate the true and trumpery treasures which Christ and the world offer. I declare it seems to me that, calmly looking at men's nature, and their duration, and then thinking of the aims of the most of them, we should not be very far wrong if we said that an epidemic of insanity sits upon the world. For surely to turn away from gold and to hug glass

beads is very little short of madness "This their way is their folly, and their posterity approve their sayings."

And now notice that this refusal may be, and often in fact is, accompanied with lip recognition of the preciousness of the neglected things. That Pharisee who put up the pillow of his pious sentiment—a piece of cant, because he did not feel what he was saying—to deaden the cannon-ball of Christ's Word, is only a pattern of a good many of us, who think that to say, "Blessed is he that eateth bread in the Kingdom of God," with the proper unctuous roll of the voice, is pretty nearly as good as to take the bread that is offered to us. There are no more difficult people to get at than the people of whom I am sure I have some specimens in these pews now, who bow their heads in assent to the word of the Gospel, and by bowing them escape its impact, and let it whistle harmlessly over. You that believe every word that I or my brethren preach, and never dream of letting it affect your conduct—if there be degrees in that lunatic asylum of the world, surely you are candidates for the highest place.

II.—Now, secondly, notice the flimsy excuses.

"They all, with one consent, began to make excuse." I do not suppose that they had laid their heads together, or that our Lord intends us to suppose that there was a conspiracy and concert of refusal, but only that without any previous consultation, all had the same sentiments, and offered substantially the same answer. All the reasons that are given come to one and the same thing—viz., occupation with present interests, duties, possessions, or affections. There are differences

in the excuses which are not only helps to the vividness of the narrative, but also express differences in the speakers. One man is a shade politer than the others. He puts his refusal on the ground of necessity. He "must," and so he courteously prays that he may be held excused. The second one is not quite so polite; but still there is a touch of courtesy about him too. He does not pretend necessity as his friend had done, but he simply says, "I *am* going"; and that is not quite so courteous as the former, but still he begs to be excused. The last man thinks that he has such an undeniable reason that he may be as brusque as he likes, and so he says, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come, and I do not make any apologies." So, with varying degrees of apparent recognition of the claim of host and feast, the ground of refusal is set forth as possessions in two cases, and as affections in the third; and these so fill the men's hearts and minds that they have no time to attend to the call that summons them to the feast.

Now it is obvious to note that the alleged necessity in one of these excuses was no necessity at all. Who made the "must"? The man himself. The field would not run away though he waited till to-morrow. The bargain was finished, for he had bought it. There was no necessity for his going, and the next day would have done quite as well as to-day; so the "must" was entirely in his own mind. That is to say, a great many of us mask inclinations under the garb of imperative duties and say, "We are so pressed by necessary obligations and engagements that we really have not any time to attend to these higher questions which you are trying to press upon us."

You remember the old story. "I must live," said the thief. "I do not see the necessity," said the judge. A man says, "I *must* be in Mosley Street to-morrow morning at half-past eight. How can I think about religion?" Well, if you really *must*, you *can* think about it. But if you are only juggling and deceiving yourself with inclinations that sham to be necessities, the sooner the veil is off, and you understand whereabouts you are, and what is your true position in reference to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the better.

But, then, let me, only in a word, remind you that the other excuse is a very operative one. "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." There are some of us around whom the strong grasp of earthly affections is flung so embracingly and sweetly that we cannot, as we think, turn our loves upward and fix them upon God. Fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, parents and children! remember Christ's deep words, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household"; and be sure that the prediction is fulfilled many a time, by the hindrances of their love even more than by the opposition of their hatred.

All these excuses refer to legitimate things. It is perfectly right that a man should go and see after his field, perfectly right that the ten bullocks should be harnessed and tried, perfectly right that the sweetness of wedded love should be tasted and drank—perfectly wrong that any of them should be put as a reason for not accepting Christ's offer. Let us take the lesson that legitimate business, and lawful and pure affections, may ruin a soul, and may constitute the hindrance that blocks its road to God.

Brethren, I said that these were flimsy excuses. I shall have to explain what I mean by that in a moment. As excuses they are flimsy; but as reasons which actually operate with hundreds of people, preventing them from being Christians, they are not flimsy; they are most solid and real. Our Lord does not mean them as exhaustive. There are a great many other grounds upon which different types of character turn away from the offered blessings of the Gospel, which do not come within view in the parable. But although not exhaustive they are widely operative. I wonder how many men and women there are here now, of whom it is true that they are so busy with their daily occupations that they have not time to be religious, and of how many men, and perhaps more especially women, in my audience it is true that their hearts are so ensnared with loves that belong to earth—beautiful and potentially sacred and elevating as these are—that they have not time to turn themselves to the one eternal Lover of all their souls. Let me beseech you, dear friends — and you especially who are strangers to this place and to my voice—to do what I cannot, and would not if I could, lay these thoughts on your own hearts, and ask yourselves, "Is it I?"

And then, before I pass from this point of my discourse, remember that the contrariety between these duties and the acceptance of the offered feast existed only in the imagination of the men who made them excuses. There is no reason why you should not go to the feast, and see after your field. There is no reason why you should not love your wife, and go to the feast. God's summons comes into collision with

many wishes, but with no duties or legitimate occupations. The more a man accepts and lives upon the good that Jesus Christ spreads before him, the more fit will he be for all his work, and for all his enjoyments. The field will be better tilled, the bullocks will be better driven, the wife will be more wisely, tenderly, and sacredly loved, if in your hearts Christ is enthroned, and whatsoever you do you do as for Him. It is only the excessive and abusive possession of His gifts and absorption in our duties and relations that turns them into impediments in the path of our Christian life. And the flimsiness of the excuse is manifest by the fact that the contrariety is self-created.

III.—Lastly, note the real reason.

I have said that as pretexts the three explanations were unsatisfactory. When a man pleads a previous engagement as a reason for not accepting an invitation, nine times out of ten it is a polite way of saying, "I do not want to go." It was so in this case. How all these absolute impossibilities, which made it perfectly out of the question that the three recreants should sit down at the table, would have melted into thin air if, by any chance, there had come into their minds a wish to be there! They would have found means to look after the field and the cattle and the home, and to be in their places notwithstanding, if they had wished. The real reason that underlies men's turning away from Christ's offer is, as I said in the beginning of my remarks, that they do not care to have it. They have no inclinations and no tastes for the higher and purer blessings

Brother, do not let us lose ourselves in generalities. I am talking about you, and about the set of your

inclinations and tastes. And I want you to ask yourself whether it is not a fact that some of you like oxen better than God; whether it is not a fact that if the two were there before you, you would rather have a good fertile field made over to you than have the food that is spread upon that table.

Well, then, what is the cause of the perverted inclination? Why is it that when Christ says, "Child, come to Me, and I will give thee pardon, peace, purity, power, hope, heaven, Myself," there is no responsive desire kindled in the heart? Why do I not want God? Why do I not care for Jesus Christ? Why do the blessings about which preachers are perpetually talking seem to me so shadowy, so remote from anything that I need, so ill-fitting to anything that I desire? There must be something very deeply wrong. This is what is wrong—your heart has shaken itself loose from dependence upon God, and you have no such love as you ought to have for Him. You prefer to stand alone. The prodigal son, having gone away into the far country, likes the swine's husks better than the bread in his father's house, and it is only when the supply of the latter coarse dainty gives out that the purer taste becomes strong. Strange, is it not? but yet it is true.

Now, there are one or two things that I want to say about this indifference, resulting from pre-occupation and from alienation, and which hides its ugliness behind all manner of flimsy excuses. One is that the reason itself is utterly unreasonable. I have said the true reason is indifference. Can anybody put into words, which do not betray the absurdity of the position, the conduct of the man who

says, "I do not want God; give me five yoke of oxen. That is the real good, and I will stick by that?" There is one mystery in the world, and if it were solved everything would be solved; and that mystery is that men turn away from God and cleave to earth. No account can be given of sin. No account can be given of man's preference for the lesser and the lower, and neglect of the greater and the higher, except to say it is utterly inexplicable and unreasonable.

I need not say that such indifference is shameful ingratitude to the yearning love which provides, and the infinite sacrifice by which was provided, this great feast to which we are asked. It took Christ's pains, and tears, and blood to prepare that feast. And He looks to us, and says to us, "Come and drink of the wine which I have mingled, and eat of the bread which I have provided at such a cost." There are monsters of ingratitude, but there are none more miraculously monstrous than the men who look, as some of us are doing, untouched on Christ's sacrifice, and listen unmoved to Christ's pleadings.

The excuses will disappear one day. We can trick our consciences; we can put off the messengers; we cannot take in the Host. All the thin curtains that we weave to veil the naked ugliness of our unwillingness to accept Christ will be burnt up. And I pray you to ask yourselves, "What shall I say when He comes and asks me, 'Why was thy place empty at My table?'" "And he was speechless." Do not, dear brethren, refuse that gift, lest you bring upon yourselves the terrible and righteous wrath of the Host whose invitation you are slighting, and at whose table you are refusing to sit.

XII.

The Great Proclamation.*

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."—Isa. lv. 1.

THE meaning of the word *preach* is "proclaim like a herald"; or, what is perhaps more familiar to most of us, like a town-crier; with a loud voice, clearly and plainly delivering his message.

Now, there are other notions of a sermon than that; and there is other work which ministers have to do, of an educational kind. But my business now is to preach; and we have ventured to ask others than the members of our own congregation to come and join us; and I should be ashamed of myself, and have good reason to be so, if I had asked you to come to hear me talk, or to entertain you with more or less eloquent and thoughtful discourses. There is a time for everything; and what this is the time for is to ring out like a bellman the message which I believe God has given me for you. It cannot but suffer in passing through human lips; but I pray that my poor words may not be all

* Preached at an Open Service.

unworthy of its stringency, and of the greatness of its blessing. My text is God's proclamation, and all that the best of us can do is but to reiterate that, more feebly, alas! but still earnestly.

Suppose there was an advertisement in to-morrow morning's Manchester papers that anybody that liked to go to a certain place might get a fortune for going, what a *queue* of waiting suppliants there would be at the door! Here is God's greatest gift going a-begging; and there are people now in this chapel who listen to my text with only the thought, "Oh, the old threadbare story is what we have been asked to come and hear!" Brethren, have you taken the offer? If not, it needs to be pressed upon you once more.

So my purpose now is a very simple one. I wish, as a brother to a brother, to put before you these three things: to whom the offer is made, what it consists of; and how it may be ours.

I.—To whom this offer is made.

It is to every one thirsty and penniless. That is a melancholy combination, to be needing something infinitely, and to have not a farthing to get it with. But that is the condition in which we all stand, in regard of the highest and best things. For this invitation of my text is as universal as if it had stopped with its third word. "Ho, every one" would have been no broader than is the offer as it stands. For the characteristics named are those which belong, necessarily and universally, to human experience. If my text had said, "Ho, every one that breathes human breath," it would not have more completely covered the whole race, and enfolded thee and me, and all our brethren, in the amplitude of its promise,

than it does when it sets up as the sole qualifications, thirst and penury—that we infinitely need and that we are absolutely unable to acquire the blessings that it offers.

"Every one that thirsteth." That means desire. Yes; but it means need also. And what is every man but a great bundle of yearnings and necessities? None of us carry within ourselves that which suffices for ourselves. We are all dependent upon external things for being and for well-being.

There are thirsts which infallibly point to their true objects. If a man is hungry he knows that it is food that he wants. And just as the necessities of the animal life are incapable of being misunderstood, and the objects which will satisfy them incapable of being confused or mistaken, so there are other nobler thirsts, which, in like manner, work automatically and point to the thing that they need. We have social instincts; we need love; we need friendship; we need somebody to lean upon; we thirst for some heart to rest our heads upon, for hands to clasp ours; and we know where the creatures and the objects are that will satisfy these desires. And there are the higher thirsts of the spirit, that "follows knowledge, like a sinking star, beyond the furthest bounds of human thought"; and a man knows where and how to gratify the impulse that drives him to seek after some forms of knowledge and wisdom.

But besides all these, besides sense, besides affection, besides emotions, besides the intellectual spur of which we are all more or less conscious, there come in a whole set of other thirsts that do not in themselves carry the intimation of the place where they

can be slaked. And so you get men restless, as some of you are; always dissatisfied, as some of you are; feeling that there is something needed, yet not knowing what, as some of you are. You remember the old story in the "Arabian Nights," of the man who had a grand palace, and lived in it quite contentedly, until somebody told him that it needed a roc's egg hanging from the roof to make it complete, and he did not know where to get that, and was miserable accordingly. We build our houses, we fancy that we are satisfied; and then there comes the stinging thought that it is not all complete yet, and we go groping, groping in the dark, to find out what it is. Shipwrecked sailors sometimes, in their desperation, drink salt water, and that makes them thirstier than ever, and brings on madness and death. Some publicans drug the vile liquors that they sell, so that they increase thirst. We may make no mistake about how to satisfy the desires of sense or of earthly affections; we may be quite certain that money answereth all things, and that it is good to get on in business in Manchester; or may have found a pure and enduring satisfaction in study and in books —yet there are thirsts that some of us know not where to satisfy; and so we have parched lips and swollen tongues and raging desires that earth can give nothing to fill.

My brother, do you know what it is that you want? It is God, nothing else, nothing less. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." The man that knows what it is of which he is in such sore need is blessed. The man who only feels dimly that he needs something, and does not know that it is God whom he

does need, is condemned to wander in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, and where his heart gapes, parched and cracked like the soil upon which he treads. Understand your thirst. Interpret your desires aright. Open your eyes to your need; and be sure of this, that mountains of money and the clearest insight into intellectual problems, and fame, and love, and wives, and children, and happy homes, and abundance of all things that you can desire, will leave a central aching emptiness that nothing and no person but God can ever fill. Oh, that we all knew what these yearnings of our hearts mean!

Aye! but there are dormant thirsts too. It is no proof of superiority that a savage has fewer wants than we have, for want is the open mouth into which supply comes. And you all have deep in your nature desires which will for ever keep you from being blessed or at rest unless they are awakened and settled, though these desires are all unconscious. The business of us preachers is, very largely, to get the people who will listen to us to recognize the fact that they do want things which they do not wish; and that, for the perfection of their natures, the cherishing of noble longings and thirstings is needful, and that to be without this sense of need is to be without one of the loftiest prerogatives of humanity.

Some of you do not want forgiveness. Many of you would much rather not have holiness. You do not want God. The promises of the Gospel go clean over your heads, and are as impotent to influence you as is the wind whistling through a keyhole, because you

have never been aware of the wants to which these promises correspond, and do not understand what it is that you truly require.

And yet there are no desires so dormant but that their being ungratified makes a man restless. You do not want forgiveness, but you will never be happy till you get it. You do not want to be good and true and holy men, but you will never be blessed till you are. You do not want God, some of you, but you will be restless till you find Him. You fancy you want heaven when you are dead; you do not want it when you are living. But until your earthly life is like the life of Jesus Christ in heaven even whilst you are on earth you will never be at rest. You are thirsty enough after these things to be ill at ease without them when you bethink yourselves, and pass out of the region of mere mechanical and habitual existence. Until you get these things that you do not desire, be sure of this, you will be tortured with vain unrest, and will find that the satisfactions which you do seek turn to ashes in your mouth. "Bread of deceit," says the Book, "is sweet to a man." The writer meant by that that there were people who found it pleasant to tell profitable lies. But we might widen the meaning, and say that all these lower satisfactions, apart from the loftier ones of forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation with God, the conscious possession of Him, a well-grounded hope of immortality, the power to live a noble life and to look forward to a glorious heaven, are deceitful bread, which promises nourishment and does not give it, but breaks the teeth that try to masticate it; "it turneth to gravel."

"Ho, every one that thirsteth." That designation includes us all. "And he that hath no money." Who has any? Notice that the persons represented in our text as penniless are, in the next verse, remonstrated with for spending "money." So then the penniless man had some pence away in some corner of his pocket which he could spend. He had the money that would buy shams, "that which is not bread" but a stone though it looks like a loaf, but he had no money for the true thing. Which being translated out of parable into fact, is simply this, that our efforts may and do win for us the lower satisfactions which meet our transitory and superficial necessities, but that no effort of ours can secure for us the loftier blessings which slake the diviner thirsts of immortal souls. A man lands in a far country with English shillings in his pocket, but he finds that no coins go there but thalers, or francs, or dollars, or the like; and his money is only current in his own land, and he has to get it changed before he can make his purchases. So, with a pocketful of it, he may as well be penniless.

And, in like fashion, with all our strenuous efforts, which we are bound to make, and which there is joy in making, after these lower things that correspond to our efforts, we find that we have no coinage that will buy the good things of the Kingdom of Heaven, without which we faint and die. Our efforts are useless. Can a man by his penitence, by his tears, by his amendment, make it possible for the consequences of his past to be obliterated, or all changed in their character into fatherly chastisement?

No. A thousand times, no. The superficial notions of Christianity, which are only too common amongst the educated and uneducated vulgar and unspiritual, may suggest to a man, "You need no Divine intervention, if only you will get up from your sin, and do your best to keep up when you are up." But those who realize more deeply what the significance of sin is, and what the eternal operation of its consequences upon the soul is, and what the awful majesty of a Divine righteousness is, learn that the man who has sinned cannot, by anything that he can do, obliterate that awful fact, or reduce it to insignificance, in its influence on the Divine relations to Him. It is only God that can do that. We have no money.

So thirsty and penniless we stand—a desperate condition! Aye! brother, it *is* desperate, and it is the condition of every one of us. I wish I could turn the generalities of my text into the individuality of a personal address. I wish I could bring its wide-flowing beneficence to a sharp point that might touch your conscience, heart, and will. I cannot do that; you must do it for yourself.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth." Will you pause for a moment, and say to yourself, "That is me"? "And he that hath no money"—that is me. "Come ye to the waters"—that is me. The proclamation is for thine ear and for thy heart; and the gift is for thy hand and thy lips.

II.—In what it consists.

They tell an old story about the rejoicings at the coronation of some great king, when there was set up in the market-place a triple fountain, from each of

whose three lips flowed a different kind of rare liquor, which any man who chose to bring a pitcher might fill from, at his choice. Notice my text, "Come ye to the *waters*" . . . "buy *wine* and *milk*." The great fountain is set up in the market-place of the world, and every man may come; and whichever of this glorious trinity of effluents he needs most, there his lip may glue itself and there it may drink, be it "water" that refreshes, or "wine" that gladdens, or "milk" that nourishes. They are all contained in this one great gift that flows out from the deep heart of God to the thirsty lips of parched humanity.

And what does that mean? Well, we may say, salvation; or we may use many other words to define the nature of the gifts. I venture to take a shorter one, and say, it means Christ. He, and not merely some truth about Him and His work; He Himself, in the fulness of His being, in the all-sufficiency of His love, in the reality of His presence, in the power of His sacrifice, in the daily derivation, into the heart that waits upon Him, of His life and His spirit, He is the all-sufficient supply of every thirst of every human soul. Do we want happiness? Christ gives us His joy, permanent and full, and not as the world gives. Do we want love? He gathers us to His heart, in which "there is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning," and binds us to Himself by bonds that Death, the separator, vainly attempts to untie, and which no unworthiness, ingratitude, coldness of ours, can ever provoke to change themselves. Do we want wisdom? He will dwell with us as our light. Do our hearts yearn for companionship?

With Him we shall never be solitary. Do we long for a bright hope which shall light up the dark future, and spread a rainbow span over the great gorge and gulf of death? Jesus Christ spans the void, and gives us unfailing and undeceiving hope. For everything that we need here or yonder, in heart, in will, in practical life, Jesus Christ Himself is the all-sufficient supply, "my life in death, my all in all." What is offered in Him may be described by all the glorious and blessed names which men have invented to designate the various aspects of the good. These are the goodly pearls that men seek, but there is one of great price which is worth them all, and gathers into itself all their clouded and fragmentary splendours. Christ is all, and the soul that has Him shall never thirst.

"Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee."

III.—Lastly, how do we get the gifts?

The paradox of my text needs little explanation, "Buy without money and without price." The contradiction on the surface is but intended to make emphatic this blessed truth, which I pray may reach your memories and hearts, that the only conditions are a sense of need, and a willingness to take—nothing else, and nothing more. We must recognize our penury, and must abandon self, and put away all ideas of having a finger in our own salvation, and be willing—which strangely and sadly enough, many of us are not—willing to be obliged to God's unhelped and undeserved love for all.

Cheap things are seldom valued. Ask a high price and people think that the commodity is precious. A man goes into a fair, for a wager, and he carries with him a tray full of gold watches and offers to sell them for a farthing apiece, and nobody will buy them. It does not, I hope, degrade the subject, if I say that Jesus Christ comes into the market-place of the world with His hands full of the gifts which the pierced hands have bought, that He may give them away. He says, "Will you take them?" And one after another you pass by on the other side, and go away to another merchant, and buy dearly things that are not worth the having.

"My father, my father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?" Would you not? Swung at the end of a pole, with hooks in your back; measured all the way from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, lying down on your face and rising at each length; done a hundred things which heathens and Roman Catholics and unspiritual Protestants think are the way to get salvation; denied yourselves things that you would like to do; done things that you do not want to do; given money that you would like to keep; avoided habits that are very sweet; gone to church and chapel when you have no heart for worship; and so tried to balance the account. If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, thou wouldst have done it. How much rather when he says, Wash and be clean. "Nothing in my hand I bring." You do *not* bring anything. "Simply to Thy cross I cling." Do you? Do you? Jesus Christ catches up the "comes" of my text, and he says,

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." Brethren, I lay it on your hearts and consciences to answer Him—never mind about me—to answer *Him*: "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not."

XIII.

Unbelieving Belief.

"AND straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."—MARK ix. 24.

E owe to Mark's Gospel the fullest account of this pathetic incident of the healing of the demoniac boy. He alone gives us this part of the conversation between our Lord and the afflicted child's father. The poor man had brought his boy to the disciples, and found them unable to do anything with him. A torrent of appeal breaks from his lips as soon as the Lord gives him an opportunity of speaking. He dwells upon all the piteous details, with that fondness for repetition which sorrow knows so well. Jesus gives him back his doubts. The father said: "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Christ's answer, according to the true reading, is not as it stands in our Authorised Version, "If Thou canst believe"—throwing as it were the responsibility on the man—but it is a quotation of the man's word, "If Thou canst?" as if He waved it aside with superb recognition of its utter unfitness to the present case. "Say not, If Thou canst. That is certain. All things are possible to thee" (not to *do*, but to *get*)

"*if*"—which is the only "if" in the case—"thou believest. I can, and if thy faith lays hold on My omnipotence, all is done."

That majestic word is like the blow of steel upon flint; it strikes a little spark of faith which lights up the soul, and turns the smoky pillar of doubt into clear flame of confidence. "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

I think in these wonderful words we have four things—the birth, the infancy, the cry, and the education of faith. And to these four I turn now.

I.—First, then, note here the birth of faith.

There are many ways to the temple, and it matters little by which of them a man travels, if so be he gets there. There is no royal road to the Christian faith which saves the soul. And yet, though identity of experience be not to be expected, men are like each other in the depths, and only unlike on the surfaces, of their being. And so one man's experience carefully analyzed is very apt to give, at least, the rudiments of the experience of all others who have been in similar circumstances. So I think we can see here, without insisting on any pedantic repetition of the same thing in every case, in broad outline, a sketch map of the road. There are three elements here: eager desire, the sense of utter helplessness, and the acceptance of Christ's calm assurances. Look at these three.

This man knew what he wanted, and he wanted it very sorely. Whosoever has any intensity and reality of desire for the great gifts which Jesus Christ comes to bestow, has taken at least one step on the way to faith Conversely, the hindrances which block the path of a great many of us are simply that we do not

care to possess the blessings which Jesus Christ in His Gospel offers. I am not talking now about so-called intellectual hindrances to belief, though I think that a great many of these, if carefully examined, would be found, in the ultimate analysis, to repose upon this same stolid indifference to the blessings which Christianity offers. But what I wish to insist upon is that for large numbers of us, and no doubt for many men and women in this place now, the real reason why they have not trust in Jesus Christ is because they do not care to possess the blessings which Jesus Christ brings. Do you wish to have your sins forgiven? Has purity any attraction for you? Do you care at all about the calm and pure blessings of communion with God? Would you like to live always in the light of His face? Do you desire to be the masters of your own lusts and passions? I do not ask you, Do you wish to go to Heaven or to escape Hell, when you die? but I ask, Has that future in any of its aspects any such power over you as that it stirs you to any earnestness and persistency of desire, or is it all shadowy and vain, ineffectual and dim?

What we Christian teachers have to fight against is that we are charged to offer to you a blessing that you do not seek, and have to create a demand before there be any acceptance of the supply. 'Give us the leeks and garlics of Egypt," said the Hebrews in the wilderness; "our soul loatheth this light bread." So it is with many of us; we do not want goodness, God, quietness of conscience, purity of life, self-consecration to a lofty ideal, one-thousandth part as much as we long for success in our daily occupations, or some one

or other of the delights that the world gives. I remember Luther, in his rough way, has a story—I think it is in his Table-talk—about a herd of swine to whom their keeper offered rich dainties, and the pigs said, "Give us grains." That is what so many men do when Jesus Christ comes with His gifts and His blessings. They turn away, but if they were offered some poor earthly good, all their desires would go out towards it, and their eager hands would be scrambling who should first possess it.

Oh! brethren, if we saw things as they are, and our needs as they are, nothing would kindle such intensity of longing in our hearts as that rejected or neglected promise of life eternal and Divine, which Jesus Christ brings. If I could only once kindle in some indifferent heart this longing, that heart would have taken at least the initial step to a life of Christian godliness.

Further, we have here the other element of a sense of utter helplessness. How often this poor father had looked at his boy in the grip of the fiend, and had wrung his hands in despair that he could not do anything for him! That same sense of absolute impotence is one which we all, if we rightly understand what we need, must cherish. Can you forgive your own sins? Can you cleanse your own nature? Can you make yourselves other than you are, by any effort of volition, or by any painfulness of discipline? To a certain small extent you can. In regard to superficial culture and eradication, your careful husbandry of your own wills may do much, but you cannot deal with your deepest needs. If we understand what is wanted in order to bring one soul into harmony

and fellowship with God, we shall recognize that we ourselves can do nothing to save, and little to help, ourselves. "Every man his own redeemer," which is the motto of some people nowadays, may do very well for fine weather and for superficial experience, but when the storm comes it proves a poor refuge, like the gay pavilions that they put up for festivals, which are all right whilst the sun is shining and the flags are fluttering, but are wretched shelters when the rain beats and the wind howls. We can do nothing for ourselves. The recognition of our own helplessness is the obverse, so to speak, and under-side of confidence in the Divine help. The coin, as it were, has its two faces. On the one is written, "Trust in the Lord"; on the other is written, "Nothing in myself." A drowning man, if he tries to help himself, only encumbers his would-be rescuer, and may drown him too. The truest help he can give is to let the strong arm that has cleft the waters for his sake fling itself around him and bear him safe to land. So, eager desire after offered blessings and consciousness of my own impotence to secure them—these are the initial steps of faith.

And the last of the elements here is listening to the calm assurance of Jesus Christ: "If thou canst! Do not say that to Me. I can. And because I can, all things are possible for thee to receive." In like manner He stands at the door of each of our hearts and speaks to each of our needs, and says: "I can satisfy it. Rest for thy soul; cleansing for thy sins; satisfaction for thy desires; guidance for thy pilgrimage; power for thy duties; patience in thy sufferings —all these will come to thee, if thou layest hold of

My hand." His assurance helps trembling confidence to be born, and out of doubt the great, calm word of the Master smites the fire of trust. And we, dear brethren, if we will listen to Him, shall surely find in Him all that we need. Think how marvellous it is that this Jewish peasant should plant Himself in the front of humanity, over against the burdened, sinful race of men, and pledge Himself to forgive and to cleanse their sins, to bear all their sicknesses, to be their strength in weakness, their comfort in sorrow, the rest of their hearts, their heaven upon earth, their life in death, their glory in heaven, and their all in all; and not only should pledge Himself, but in the blessed experience of millions should have more than fulfilled all that He promised. "They trusted in Him, and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." Will you not answer His sovereign word of promise with your "Lord! I believe"?

II.—Then, secondly, we have here the infancy of faith.

As soon as the consciousness of belief dawned upon the father, and the effort to exercise it was put forth, there sprang up the consciousness of its own imperfection. He would never have known that he did not believe unless he had tried to believe. So it is in regard to all excellences and graces of character. The sense of possessing some feeble degree of any virtue or excellence, and the effort to put it forth, is the surest way of discovering how little of it we have. On the other side, sorrow for the lack of some form of goodness is itself a proof of the partial possession, in some rudimentary and incipient form, of that goodness. The utterly lazy man never mourns over

his idleness; it is only the one that would fain work harder than he does, and already works tolerably hard, who does so. So the little spark of faith in this man's heart, like a taper in a cavern, showed the abysses of darkness that lay unillumined round about it.

Thus then, in its infancy, faith may and does co-exist with much unfaith and doubt. The same state of mind, looked at from its two opposite ends, as it were, may be designated faith or unbelief; just as a piece of shot silk, according to the angle at which you hold it, may show you only the bright colours of its warp or the dark ones of its weft. When you are travelling in a railway train with the sun streaming in at the windows, if you look out on the one hand, you will see the illumined face of every tree and blade of grass and house; and if you look out on the other, you will see the dark side. And so the same landscape may seem to be all lit up by the sunshine of belief, or to be darkened by the gloom of distrust. If we consider how great and how perfect ought to be our confidence, to bear any due proportion to the firmness of that upon which it is built, we shall not be slow to believe that through life there will always be the presence, more or less, of these two elements. There will be all degrees of progress between the two extremes of infantile and mature faith.

There follows from that thought this practical lesson, that the discovery of much unbelief should never make a man doubt the reality or genuineness of his little faith. We are all apt to write needlessly bitter things against ourselves when we get a glimpse of the incompleteness of our Christian life and

character. But there is no reason why a man should fancy that he is a hypocrite because he finds out that he is not a perfect believer. But, on the other hand, let us remember that the main thing is not the maturity, but the progressive character, of faith. It was most natural that this man in our text, at the very first moment when he began to put his confidence in Jesus Christ as able to heal his child, should be aware of much tremulousness mingling with it. But is it not most unnatural that there should be the same relative proportion of faith and unbelief in the heart and experience of those who have long professed to be Christians? You do not expect the infant to have adult limbs, but you do expect it to grow. True, faith at its beginning may be like a grain of mustard seed, but if the grain of mustard seed be alive, it will grow to a great tree, where all the fowls of the air can lodge in the branches. Oh! it is a crying shame and sin that there should be in all Christian communities so many grey-headed babies—men who have for years and years been professing to be Christ's followers, and whose faith is but little, if at all, stronger—nay! perhaps is even obviously weaker—than it was in the first days of their profession. "Ye have need of milk, and not of strong meat," very many of you. And your faith is made suspicious, not because it is feeble, but because it is not growing stronger.

III.—Notice the cry of infant faith.

"Help Thou mine unbelief" may have either of two meanings. The man's desire was either that his faith should be increased and his unbelief "helped" by being removed, by Christ's operation upon his spirit, or that Christ would "help" him and his boy

by healing the child, though the faith which asked the blessing was so feeble that it might be called unbelief. There is nothing in the language or in the context to determine which of these two meanings is intended; we must settle it by our own sense of what would be most likely under the circumstances. To me it seems extremely improbable that, when the father's whole soul was absorbed in the healing of his son, he should turn aside to ask for the inward and spiritual process of having his faith strengthened. Rather he said, "Heal my child, though it is unbelief as much as faith that asks Thee to do it."

The lesson is that, even when we are conscious of much tremulousness in our faith, we have a right to ask and expect that it shall be answered. Weak faith *is* faith. The tremulous hand *does* touch. The cord may be slender as a spider's web that binds a heart to Jesus, but it *does* bind. The poor woman in the other miracle, who put out her wasted finger-tip, coming behind Him in the crowd, and stealthily touching the hem of His garment, though it was only the end of her finger-nail that was on the robe, carried away with her the blessing. And so the feeblest faith joins the soul, in the measure of its strength, to Jesus Christ.

But let us remember that, whilst thus the cry of infant faith is heard, the stronger voice of stronger faith is more abundantly heard. Jesus Christ once for all laid down the law when He said to one of the suppliants at His feet, "According to your faith be it unto you." The measure of our belief is the measure of our blessing. The wider you open the door, the more angels will crowd into it, with their white wings

and their calm faces. The bore of the pipe determines the amount of water that flows into the cistern. Every man gets, in the measure in which he desires. Though a tremulous hand may hold out a cup into which Jesus Christ will not refuse to pour the wine of the Kingdom, yet the tremulous hand will spill much of the blessing; and he that would have the full enjoyment of the mercies promised, and possible, must "ask in faith, nothing wavering." The sensitive paper, which records the hours of sunshine in a day, has great gaps upon its line of light answering to the times when clouds have obscured the sun; and the communication of blessings from God is intermittent, if there be intermittency of faith. If you desire an unbroken line of mercy, joy, and peace, keep up an unbroken continuity of trustful confidence.

IV.—Lastly, we have here the education of faith. Christ paid no heed in words to this confession of unbelief, but proceeded to do the work which answered the prayer in both its possible meanings. He responded to imperfect confidence by His perfect work of cure; and, by that perfect work of cure, He strengthened the imperfect confidence which it answered.

Thus He educates us by His answers—His over-answers—to our poor desires; and the abundance of His gfits rebukes the poverty of our petitions, more emphatically than any words of remonstrance beforehand could have done. He does not lecture us into faith, but He blesses us into it. When the Apostle was sinking in the flood, Jesus Christ said no word of reproach until He had grasped him with His strong hand, and held him safe. And then, when Christ's

sustaining touch thrilled through all Peter's frame, then, and not till then, He said—as we may fancy, with a smile on His face that the moonlight showed, as knowing how unanswerable His question was—"O thou of little faith; *wherefore* didst thou doubt?" That is how He will deal with us if we will; over-answering our tremulous petitions, and so teaching us to hope more abundantly that we shall praise Him more and more.

The disappointments, the weaknesses, the shameful defeats which come when our confidence fails, are another page of His lesson-book. The same Apostle of whom I have been speaking got that lesson when, standing on the billows, and, instead of looking at Christ, looking at their wrath and foam, his heart failed him, and because his heart failed him, he began to sink. If we turn away from Jesus Christ, and interrupt the continuity of our faith by calculating the height of the breakers and the weight of the water that is in them, and what will become of us when they topple over with their white crests upon our heads, then gravity will begin to work, and we shall begin to sink. And well for us if, when we have sunk as far as our knees, we look again to the Master and say, "Lord! save me; I perish!" The weakness which is our own when faith sleeps, and the rejoicing power which is ours because it is His, when faith wakes, are God's education of it to fuller and ampler degrees and depth. We shall lose the meaning of life, and the best lesson that joy and sorrow, calm and storm, victory and defeat, can give us, unless all these make us "rooted and grounded in faith."

Dear friend, do you desire your truest good? Do

you know that you cannot win it, or fight for it to gain it, or do anything to obtain it, in your own strength? Have you heard Jesus Christ saying to you, "Come . . . and I will give you rest?" Oh! I beseech you do not turn away from Him, but like this agonized father in our story, fall at His feet with "Lord! I believe; help Thou mine unbelief," and He will confirm your feeble faith by His rich response.

XIV.

The Sluggard in Harvest.

"The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing."—PROVERBS xx. 4.

LIKE all the sayings of this book, this is simply a piece of plain, practical common sense. It is intended to inculcate the lesson that men should diligently seize the opportunity whilst it is theirs. The sluggard is one of the pet aversions of the Book of Proverbs, which, unlike most other manuals of Eastern wisdom, has a profound reverence for honest work.

He is a great drone, for he prefers the chimney-corner to the field, even although it cannot have been very cold, if the weather was open enough to admit of ploughing. And he is a great fool, too, for he buys his comfort at a very dear price, as do all men who live for to-day, and let to-morrow look out for itself.

But, like most of the other sayings of this book, my text contains principles which are true in the highest regions of human life, for the laws which rule up there are not different from those which regulate the motions of its lower phases. Religion recognizes the

same practical common-sense principles that daily business does. I venture to take this as my text now, in addressing young people, because they have special need of, and special facilities for, the wisdom which it enjoins; and because the words only want to be turned with their faces heavenwards in order to enforce the great appeal, the only one which it is worth my while to make and worth your while to come here to listen to; the appeal to each of you: "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye yield yourselves to God" *now*.

My object, then, will be perhaps best accomplished if I simply ask you to look, first, at the principles involved in this quaint proverb; and, secondly, to apply them in one or two directions.

I.—First, then, let us try to bring out the principles which are crystallized in this picturesque saying.

The first thought evidently is: present conduct determines future conditions. Life is a series of epochs, each of which has its destined work, and that being done, all is well; and that being left undone, all is ill.

Now, of course, in regard of many of the accidents of a man's condition, his conduct is only one, and by no means the most powerful, of the factors which settle them. The position which a man fills, the tasks which he has to perform, and the whole host of things which make up the externals of his life, depend upon far other conditions than any that he brings to them. But yet, on the whole, it is true that what a man does, and is, settles how he fares. And this is the mystical importance and awful solemnity of the most undistinguished moments and most trivial

acts of this awful life of ours, that each of them has an influence on all that comes after, and may deflect our whole course into altogether different paths. It is not only the moments that we vulgarly and blindly call great which settle our condition. But it is the accumulation of the tiny ones; the small deeds, the unnoticed acts, which make up so large a portion of every man's life—it is these, after all, that are the most powerful in settling what we shall be. There come to each of us supreme moments in our lives. Yes, and if in all the subordinate and insignificant moments we have not been getting ready for them, but have been nurturing dispositions and acquiring habits and cultivating ways of acting and thinking which condemn us to fail beneath the requirements of the supreme moment, then it passes us by, and we gain nothing from it. Tiny mica flakes have built up the Matterhorn, and the minute acts of life after all, by their multiplicity, make life to be what it is. "Sand is heavy," says this wise Book of Proverbs. The aggregation of the minutest grains, singly so light that they would not affect the most delicate balance, weighs upon us with a weight "heavy as frost, and deep almost as life." The mystic significance of the trivialities of life is that in them we largely make destiny, and that in them we wholly make character.

And now, whilst this is true about all life, it is especially true about youth. You have facilities for moulding your being which some of us older men would give a great deal to have again for a moment with our present knowledge and bitter experience. The lava that has solidified into hard rock with us is

yet molten and plastic with you. You can, I was going to say, be anything you make up your minds to; and, within reasonable limits, the bold saying is true. "Ask what thou wilt and it shall be given to thee" is what Nature and Providence, almost as really as grace and Christ, say to every young man and woman, because you are the arbiters, not wholly, indeed, of your destiny, and are the architects, altogether, of your character, which is more.

And so I desire to lay upon your hearts this threadbare old truth, because you are living in the ploughing time, and the harvest is months ahead. Whilst it is true that every day is the child of all the yesterdays, and the parent of all the to-morrows, it is also true that life has its predominant colouring, varying at different epochs, and that for you, though you are largely inheriting, even now, the results of your past, brief as it is, still more largely is the future, the plastic future, in your hands, to be shaped into such forms as you will. "The child is father of the man," and the youth has the blessed prerogative of standing before the mouldable to-morrow, and possessing a nature still capable of being cast into an almost infinite variety of form.

But then, not only do you stand with special advantages for making yourselves what you will, but you specially need to be reminded of the terrible importance and significance of each moment. For this is the very irony of human life, that we seldom awake to the sense of its importance till it is nearly ended, and that the period when reflection would avail the most is precisely the period when it is the least strong and habitual. What is the use of an old

man like me thinking about what he could make of life if he had it to do over again, as compared with the advantage of your thinking what you will make of it. Yet I daresay that for once that you think thus, many old men do it fifty times. So, not to abate one jot of your buoyancy, not to cast any shadow over joys and hopes, but to lift you to a sense of the blessed possibilities of your position, I want to lay this principle of my text upon your consciences, and to beseech you to try to keep it operatively in mind —you are making yourselves, and settling your destiny, by every day of your plastic youth.

There is another principle as clear in my text—viz., the easy road is generally the wrong one. The sluggard was warmer at the fireside than he would be in the field with his plough, in the north wind, and so he stopped there. There are always obstacles in the way of noble life. It is always easier, as flesh judges, to live ignobly, than to live as Jesus Christ would have us live. "Endure hardness" is the commandment to all who would be soldiers of any great cause, and would not fling away their lives in low self-indulgence. If a man is going to be anything worth being, or to do anything worth doing, he must start with, and adhere to, the resolve "to scorn delights and live laborious days." And only then has he a chance of rising above the fat dull weed that rots in Lethe's stream, and of living anything like the life that it becomes him to live.

Be sure of this, dear young friends, that self-denial and rigid self-control, in its two forms, of stopping your ears to the attractions of lower pleasures, and of cheerily encountering difficulties, is an indispensable

condition of any life which shall at the last yield a harvest worth the gathering, and not destined to be "cast as rubbish to the void, when God hath made the pile complete." Never allow yourselves to be turned away from the plain path of duty by any difficulties. Never allow yourselves to be guided in your choice of a road by the consideration that the turf is smooth, and the flowers by the side of it sweet. Remember, the sluggard would have been warmer, with a wholesome warmth, at the plough-tail than cowering in the chimney-corner. And the things that seem to be difficulties and hardships only need to be fronted to yield, like the east wind in its season, good results in bracing and hardening. Fix it in your minds that nothing worth doing is done but at the cost of difficulty and toil.

That is a lesson that this generation wants, even more than some that have preceded it. I suppose it is one of the temptations of older men to look askance upon the amusements of younger ones, but I cannot help lifting up here one word of earnest appeal to the young men and women of this congregation, and beseeching them, as they value the nobleness of their own lives, and their power of doing any real good, to beware of what seems to me the altogether extravagant and excessive love of, and following after, mere amusement which characterises this day to so large an extent. Better toil than such devotion to mere relaxation!

The last principle here is that the season let slip is gone for ever. Whether my text, in its second picture, intends us to think of the sluggard, when the harvest came, as "begging" from his neighbours;

or whether, as is possibly the construction of the Hebrew, it simply means to describe him as going out into his field, and looking at it, and asking for the harvest and seeing nothing there but weeds, the lesson it conveys is the same. The old, old lesson, so threadbare that I should be almost ashamed of taking up your time with it, unless I believed that you did not lay it to heart as you should. Opportunity is bald behind, and must be grasped by the forelock. Life is full of tragic *might-have-beens.* No regret, no remorse, no self-accusation, no clear recognition that I was a fool will avail one jot. The time for ploughing is past; you cannot stick the share into the ground when you should be wielding the sickle. "Too late" is the saddest of human words. And, my brother, as the stages of our lives roll on, unless each is filled, as it passes, with the discharge of the duties, and the appropriation of the benefits which it brings, then, to all eternity, that moment will never return, and the sluggard may beg in harvest that he may have the chance to plough once more, and have none. The student who has spent the term in indolence, perhaps dissipation, has no time to get up his subject when he is in the examination room, with the paper before him. And life, and nature, and God's law, which is the Christian expression for the godless word *nature,* are stern taskmasters, and demand that the duty shall be done in its season or left undone for ever.

II.—In the second place, let me just, in a few words, carry the lamp of these principles of my text and flash its rays upon one or two subjects.

Let me say a word, first, about the lowest sphere to which my text applies. I referred at the beginning

of this discourse to this proverb as simply an inculcation of the duty of honest work, and of the necessity of being wide awake to opportunities in our daily work. Now, the most of you young men, and many of you young women, are destined for ordinary trades, professions, walks in commerce; and I do not suppose it to be beneath the dignity of the pulpit to say this: Do not trust to any way of getting on by dodges or speculation, or favour, or by anything but downright hard work. Don't shirk difficulties, don't try to put the weight of the work upon some colleague or other, that you may have an easier life of it. Set your backs to your tasks, and remember that "in all labour there is profit"; and whether the profit comes to you in the shape of advancement, position, promotion in your offices, partnerships perhaps, wealth, and the like, or no, the profit lies in the work. Honest toil is the key to pleasure.

Then, let me apply the text in a somewhat higher direction. Carry these principles with you in the cultivation of that important part of yourself—your intellects. What would some of us old students give if we had the flexibility, the power of assimilating new truth, the retentive memories, that you young people have! Some of you, perhaps, are students by profession; I should like all of you to make a conscience of making the best of your brains, as God has given them to you in trust. "The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold." The dawdler will read no books that tax his intellect, therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing. Amidst all the flood of feeble, foolish, flaccid literature with which we are afflicted at this day, I wonder how many

of you young men and women ever set yourselves to some great book or subject that you cannot understand without effort. Unless you do, you are not faithful stewards of God's supreme gift of that great faculty which apprehends and lives upon truth. So remember the sluggard by his fireside; and do you get out with your plough.

Again, I may apply these principles to a higher work still—that of the formation of character. Nothing will come to you noble, great, or elevating in that direction unless it is sought, and sought with toil.

> "In woods, in waves, in wars, she's wont to dwell,
> And will be found with peril and with pain;
> Before her gate high Heaven did sweat ordain,
> And wakeful watches ever to abide."

Wisdom and truth, and all their elevating effects upon human character, absolutely require for their acquirement effort and toil. You have the opportunity still. As I said a moment ago—you may mould yourselves into noble forms. But in the making of character we have to work as a painter in fresco does, with a swift brush on the plaster while it is wet. It sets and hardens in an hour. And men drift into habits which become tyrannies and dominant, before they know where they are. Do not let yourselves be shaped by accident, by circumstance. Remember that you can build yourselves up into forms of beauty by the help of the grace of God, and that, for such building, there must be the diligent labour and that wise clutching at opportunity and understanding of the times, which my text suggests.

And, lastly, let these principles be applied to religion

and teach us the wisdom and necessity of beginning the Christian life at the earliest moment. I am by no means prepared to say that the extreme tragedy of my text can ever be wrought out, in regard to the religious experience of any man, here on earth; for I believe that, at any moment in his career, however faultful and stained his past has been, and however long and obstinate has been his continuance in evil, a man may turn himself to Jesus Christ, and beg, and not in vain, nor ever find "nothing" there.

But whilst all that is quite true, I want you, dear young friends, to lay this to heart, that if you do not yield yourselves to Jesus Christ now, in your early days, and take Him for your Saviour, and rest your souls upon Him, and then take Him for your Captain and Commander, for your Pattern and Example, for your Companion and your aim, you will lose what you can never make up by any future course. You lose years of blessedness, of peaceful society with Him, of illumination and inspiration. You lose all the sweetness of the days which you spend away from Him. And if at the end you did come to Him, you would have one regret, deep and permanent, that you had not gone to Him before. If you put off, as some of you are putting off, what you know you ought to do—namely, to give your hearts to Jesus Christ and become His—think of what you are laying up for yourselves thereby. You get much that it would be gain to lose—bitter memories, defiled imaginations, stings of conscience, habits that it will be very hard to break, and the sense of having wasted the best part of your lives, and having but the fag end to bring to Him. And if you put off, as some of you are disposed to do—think of

the risk you run. It is very unlikely that susceptibilities will remain if they are trifled with. You remember that Felix trembled once, and sent for Paul often; but we never hear that he trembled any more. And it is quite possible, and quite likely, more likely than not, that you will never be as near being a Christian again as you are now, if you turn away from the impressions that are made upon you at this moment, and stifle your half-formed resolution.

But there is a more solemn thought still. This life as a whole is to the future life as the ploughing time is to the harvest, and there are awful words in Scripture, which seem to point in the same direction in reference to the irrevocable and irreversible issue of neglected opportunities on earth, as this proverb does in regard to the ploughing and harvests of this life.

I dare not conceal what seems to me the New Testament confirmation and deepening of the solemn words of our text, "He shall beg in harvest and have nothing,' by the Master's words, "Many shall say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! and I will say I never knew you." The five virgins, who rubbed their sleepy eyes and asked for oil when the master was at hand, got none; and when they besought, "Lord! Lord! open to us," all the answer was, "Too late! too late! ye cannot enter now." Now, while it is called day, harden not your hearts.

XV.

Simplicity towards Christ.

"I FEAR lest by any means your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."—2 COR. xi. 3.

THE Revised Version, amongst other alterations, reads, "the simplicity that is *towards* Christ."

The inaccurate rendering of the Authorized Version is responsible for a mistake in the meaning of these words, which has done much harm. They have been supposed to describe a quality or characteristic belonging to Christ or the Gospel; and, so construed, they have sometimes been made the watchword of narrowness and of intellectual indolence. "Give us the simple Gospel" has been the cry of people who have thought themselves to be evangelical when they were only lazy, and the consequence has been that preachers have been expected to reiterate commonplaces, which have made both them and their hearers listless, and to sink the educational for the evangelistic aspect of the Christian teacher's function.

It is quite true that the Gospel is simple, but it is also true that it is deep, and they will best appreciate its simplicity who have most honestly endeavoured to

fathom its depth. When we let our little sounding lines out, and find that they do not reach the bottom, we begin to wonder even more at the transparency of the clear abyss. It is not simplicity *in* Christ, but *toward* Christ of which the Apostle is speaking; not a quality in Him, but a quality in us towards Him. I wish, then, now to turn to the two thoughts that these words suggest—first and chiefly, the attitude towards Christ which befits our relation to Him; and, secondly and briefly, the solicitude for its maintenance.

I.—First, then, consider the attitude towards Christ which befits the Christian relation to Him.

The word "simplicity" has had a touch of contempt associated with it. It is a somewhat doubtful compliment to say of a man that he is "simple-minded." All noble words which describe great qualities get oxydized by exposure to the atmosphere, and rust comes over them, as, indeed, all good things tend to become deteriorated in time and by use. But the notion of the word is really a very noble and lofty one. To be "without a fold," which is the meaning of the Greek and of the equivalent "simplicity," is, in one aspect, to be transparently honest and true, and in another to be out and out of a piece. There is no underside of the cloth, doubled up beneath the upper which shows, and running in the opposite direction; but all tends in one way. A man with no under-currents, no by-ends, who is, down to the very roots, what he looks, and all whose being is knit together and hurled in one direction, without reservation or back-drawing, that is the "simple" man whom the Apostle means. Such simplicity is the truest wisdom

Such simplicity of devotion to Jesus Christ is the only attitude of heart and mind which corresponds to the facts of our relation to Him. That relation is set forth in the context by a very sweet and tender image, in the true line of Scriptural teaching, which in many a place speaks of the Bride and Bridegroom, and which on its last page shows us the Lamb's wife descending from Heaven to meet her husband. The state of devout souls and of the community of such here on earth is that of betrothal. Their state in heaven is that of marriage. Very beautiful it is to see how this fiery Paul, like the ascetic John, who never knew the sacred joys of that state, lays hold of the thoughts of the Bridegroom and the Bride, and of his own relation to both, as indicating the duties of the Church and the solicitude of the Apostle. He says that he has been the intermediary who, according to Oriental custom, arranged the preliminaries of the marriage, and brought the bride to the bridegroom; and, as the friend of the latter standing by rejoices greatly to hear the bridegroom's voice, and is solicitous mainly that in the tremulous heart of the betrothed there should be no admixture of other loves, but a whole-hearted devotion, an exclusive affection, and an absolute obedience, "I have espoused you," says he, "to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest . . . your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity that is towards Him."

Now that metaphor carries in its implication all that anybody can say about the exclusiveness, the depth, the purity, the all-pervasiveness of the dependent love which should knit us to Jesus Christ.

The same thought of whole-hearted, single, absolute devotion is conveyed by other Scripture metaphors, the *slave* and the *soldier* of Christ. But all that is repellent or harsh in these is softened and glorified when we contemplate it in the light of the metaphor of my text.

So I might leave it to do its own work, but I may perhaps be allowed to follow out the thought in one or two directions.

The attitude, then, which corresponds to our relation to Jesus Christ is, first, that of a faith which looks to Him exclusively as the source of salvation and of light. The specific danger which was alarming Paul, in reference to that community of Christians in Corinth, was one which, in its particular form, is long since dead and buried. But the principles which underlay it, the tendencies to which it appealed, and the perils which Paul foresaw for the Corinthian Church, are perennial. He feared that these Judaizing teachers, who dogged his heels all his life long, and whose one aim seemed to be to build upon his foundation and to overthrow his building, should find their way into this church and wreck it. The keenness of the polemic, in this and in the contextual chapters, shows how real and imminent the danger was. Now what these men did was to tell people that Jesus Christ had a partner in His saving work. They said that obedience to the Jewish law, ceremonial and other, was a condition of salvation, along with trust in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. And because they thus shared out the work of salvation between Jesus Christ and something else, Paul thundered and lightened at them all his life, and, as he tells us in

this context, regarded them as preaching another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel.

That particular error is long dead and buried. But is there nothing else that has come into its place? Has this old foe not got a new face, and does not it live amongst us as really as it lived then? I think it does; whether in the form of the grosser kind of sacramentarianism and ecclesiasticism which sticks sacraments and a church in front of the Cross, or in the form of the definite denial that Jesus Christ's death on the Cross is the one means of salvation, or simply in the form of the coarse, common wish to have a finger in the pie and a share in the work of saving myself, as a drowning man will sometimes half drown his rescuer by trying to use his own limbs. These tendencies which Paul fought, and which he feared would corrupt the Corinthian Christians from their simple and exclusive reliance on Christ and Christ alone as the ground and author of their salvation, are perennial in human nature. And we have to be on our guard for ever and for ever against them. Whether they come in organized, systematic, doctrinal form, or whether they are simply the rising in our own hearts of the old Adam of pride and self-trust, they equally destroy the whole work of Christ, because they infringe upon its solitariness and uniqueness. We are not to trust Christ *and* anything else. Men are not saved by a syndicate. It is Jesus Christ alone, and "beside Him there is no Saviour." You go into a Turkish mosque and see the roof held up by a forest of slim pillars. You go into a cathedral chapter-house, and there is one strong support in the centre that bears the whole roof. The one is an emblem of the Christ-

less multiplicity of vain supports, the other of the solitary strength and eternal sufficiency of the one pillar on which the whole weight of a world's salvation rests, and which lightly bears it triumphantly aloft. "I fear lest your minds be corrupted from the simplicity" of a reasonable faith directed towards Christ.

And in like manner He is the sole light and teacher of men as to God, themselves, their duty, their destinies and prospects; He and He alone brings these things to light. His word, whether it comes from His lips or from the deeds which are part of His revelation, or from the voice of the Spirit which takes of His and speaks to the ages through His apostles, should be "the end of all strife.' What He says, and all that He says, and nothing else than what He says, is the creed of the Christian. He and He only is "the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' In this day of babblements and confusions, let us listen for the voice of Christ and accept all which comes from Him and let the language of our deepest hearts be, "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life."

Again, our relation to Jesus Christ demands exclusive love to Him. "Demands" is an ugly word to bracket with love. We might say and perhaps more truly, permits or privileges It is the joy of the betrothed that her duty is to love and to keep her heart clear from all competing affections. But it is none the less her duty because it is her joy What Christ is to you, if you are a Christian, and what He wants to be to us all, whether we are Christians or not, is of such a kind that the only fitting

attitude of our hearts to Him in response is that of exclusive affection. I do not mean that we are to love nothing but Him, but I mean that we are to love all things else in Him, and that, if any creature so delays or deflects our love as that either it does not pass by means of the creature into the presence of the Christ, or is turned away from the Christ by the creature, then we have fallen beneath the sweet level of our lofty privilege, and have won for ourselves the misery due to distracted and idolatrous hearts. Love to one who has done what He has done for us is in its very nature exclusive, and its exclusiveness is complete exclusiveness. The centre diamond makes the little stones set round it all the more lustrous. We must love Jesus Christ all in all or not at all. Divided love incurs the condemnation that falls heavily upon the head of the faithless bride.

Dear friends, the conception of the essence of religion as being love is no relaxation, but an increase, of its stringent requirements. The more we think of that sweet bond as being the true union of the soul with God, who is its only rest and home, the more reasonable and imperative will appear the old commandment, "Thou shalt love Him with all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and mind."

But, further, our relation to Jesus Christ is such as that nothing short of absolute obedience to His commandments corresponds to it. There must be the simplicity, the single-mindedness that thus obeys, and obeys swiftly, cheerfully, constantly. In all matters His command is my law, and, as surely as I make His command my law, will He make my desire the mould and measure for His gifts. For

He Himself has said, in words that bring together our obedience to His will, and His compliance with our wishes, in a fashion that we should not have ventured upon unless He had set us an example, "If ye love Me keep My commandments. If ye ask anything in My name I will do it." The exclusive love that binds us, by reason of our faith in Him, to that sole Lord ought to express itself in unhesitating, unfaltering, unreserved, and unreluctant obedience to every word that comes from His mouth.

These brief outlines are but the poorest attempt to draw out what the words of my text imply. But such as they are, let us remember that they do set forth the only proper response of the saved man to the saving Christ. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Anything short of a faith that rests on Him alone, of a love that knits itself to His single, all-sufficient heart, and of an obedience that bows the whole being to the sweet yoke of His commandment, is an unworthy answer to the love that died, and that lives for us all

II.—And now I have only time to glance at the solicitude for the maintenance of this exclusive single-mindedness towards Christ.

Think of what threatens it. I say nothing about the ferment of opinion in this day, for for one man that is swept away from a thorough whole-hearted faith by intellectual considerations, there are a dozen from whom it is filched without their knowing it, by their own weaknesses, and the world's noises. And so it is more profitable that we should think of the whole crowd of external duties, enjoyments, sweetnesses, bitternesses, that solicit us, and seek to draw us away. Who can hear the low voice that speaks

peace and wisdom when Niagara is roaring past his ears? "The world is too much with us, late and soon Buying and selling we lay waste our powers," and break ourselves away from our simple devotion to that dear Lord. But it is possible that we may so carry into all the whirl a central peace, as that we shall not be disturbed by it; and possible that, "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do all to His glory," so that we can, even in the midst of our daily pressing avocations and cares, be keeping our hearts in the Heavens, and our souls in touch with our Lord.

But it is not only things without that draw us away. Our own weaknesses and waywardnesses, our strong senses, our passions, our desires, our necessities, all these have a counteracting force, which needs continual watchfulness in order to be neutralized. No man can grasp a stay, which alone keeps him from being immersed in the waves, with uniform tenacity, unless every now and then he tightens his muscles. And no man can keep himself firmly grasping Jesus Christ, without conscious effort directed to bettering his hold.

If there are dangers around us, and dangers within us, the discipline, which we have to pursue in order to secure this uniform single-hearted devotion, is plain enough. Let us be vividly conscious of the peril—which is what some of us are not. Let us take stock of ourselves, lest creeping evil may be encroaching upon us, while we are all unaware—which is what some of us never do. Let us clearly contemplate the possibility of an indefinite increase in the closeness and thoroughness of our surrender to Him—a con-

viction which has faded away from the minds of many professing Christians. Above all, let us find or make time for the patient, habitual contemplation of the great facts which kindle our devotion. For if you never think of Jesus Christ and His love to you, how can you love Him back again? And if you are so busy carrying out your own secular affairs, or pursuing your own ambitions, or attending to your own duties (as they may seem to be) that you have no time to think of Christ, His death, His life, His Spirit, His yearning heart over His bride, how can it be expected that you will have any depth of love to Him? Let us, too, wait with prayerful patience for that Divine Spirit who will knit more closely to our Lord.

Unless we do, we shall get no happiness out of our religion, and it will bring no praise to Christ or profit to ourselves. I do not know a more miserable man than a half-and-half Christian, after the pattern of, I was going to say, the ordinary average of professing Christians of this generation. He has religion enough to prick and sting him, and not enough to impel him to forsake the evil, which yet he cannot comfortably do. He has religion enough to inflame his conscience, not enough to subdue his will and heart. How many of my hearers are in that condition it is for them to settle. If we are to be Christian men at all, let us be so out and out. Half-and-half religion is no religion.

> "One foot on land, and one on sea.
> To one thing constant never!"

That is the type of thousands of professing Christians. "I fear lest by any means your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is towards Christ."

XVI.

The Race and the Goal.

"THIS one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize."—PHIL. iii. 13, 14.

THIS buoyant energy and onward looking are marvellous in "Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Forgetfulness of the past and eager anticipation for the future are, we sometimes think, the child's prerogatives. They may be ignoble and puerile, or they may be worthy and great. All depends on the future to which we look. If it be the creation of our fancies, we are babies for trusting it. If it be, as Paul's was, the revelation of God's purposes, we cannot do a wiser thing than look.

The Apostle here is letting us see the secret of his own life, and telling us what made him the sort of Christian that he was. He counsels wise obliviousness, wise anticipation, strenuous concentration; and these are the things that contribute to success in any field of life. Christianity is the perfection of common sense. Men become mature Christians by no other means than those by which they become good artizans,

ripe scholars, or the like. But the misery is that, though people know well enough that they cannot be good carpenters, or doctors, or fiddlers without certain habits and practices, they seem to fancy that they can be good Christians without them.

So the words of my text may suggest appropriate thoughts on this first Sunday of a new year. Let us listen, then, to Paul telling us how he came to be the sort of Christian man he was.

I.—First, then, I would say, make God's aim your aim.

Paul distinguishes here between the "mark" and the "prize." He aims at the one for the sake of the other. The one is the object of effort; the other is the sure result of successful effort. If I may so say, the crown hangs on the winning post; and he who touches the goal clutches the garland.

Then, mark that he regards the aim towards which he strains as being the aim which Christ had in view in his conversion. For he says in the preceding context, "I labour if that I may lay hold of that for which also I have been laid hold of by Jesus Christ." In the words that follow the text he speaks of the prize as being the result and purpose of the high calling of God "in Christ Jesus." So then he took God's purpose in calling, and Christ's purpose in redeeming him, as being his great object in life. God's aims and Paul's were identical.

What, then, is the aim of God in all that He has done for us? The production in us of God-like and God-pleasing character. For this suns rise and set; for this seasons and times come and go; for this sorrows and joys are experienced; for this hopes and

fears and loves are kindled. For this all the discipline of life is set in motion. For this we were created, for this we have been redeemed. For this Jesus Christ lived and suffered and died. For this God's Spirit is poured out upon the world. All else is scaffolding; this is the building which it contemplates, and when the building is reared the scaffolding may be cleared away. God means to make us like Himself, and so pleasing to Himself, and has no other end in all the varieties of His gifts and bestowments but only this, the production of character.

Such is the aim that we should set before us. The acceptance of that aim as ours will give nobleness and blessedness to our lives, as nothing else will. How different all our estimates of the meaning and true nature of events would be, if we kept clearly before us that their intention was not merely to make us blessed and glad, or to make us sorrowful, but that, through the blessedness, through the sorrow, through the gift, through the withdrawal, through all the variety of dealings, the intention was one and the same, to mould us to the likeness of our Lord and Saviour! There would be fewer mysteries in our lives, we should seldomer have to stand in astonishment, in vain regret, in miserable and weakening retrospect of vanished gifts, and saying to ourselves, "Why has this darkness stooped upon my path?" if we looked beyond the darkness and the light, to that for which both were sent. Some plants require frost to bring out their savour, and men need sorrow to test and to produce their highest qualities. There would be fewer knots in the thread of our lives, and fewer

mysteries in our experience, if we made God's aim ours, and strove through all variations of condition to realize it.

How different all our estimate of nearer objects and aims would be, if once we clearly recognized what we are here for! The prostitution of powers to obviously unworthy aims and ends is the saddest thing in humanity. It is like elephants being set to pick up pins; it is like the lightning being harnessed to carry all the gossip and filth of one capital of the world to prurient readers in another. Men take these great powers which God has given them, and use them to make money, to cultivate their intellects, to secure the gratification of earthly desires, to make a home for themselves here amidst the illusions of time; and all the while the great aim, which ought to stand out clear and supreme, is forgotten by them.

There is nothing that needs more careful examination by us than our accepted schemes of life for ourselves. The roots of our errors mostly lie in these beliefs that we take to be axioms and never examine into. Let us begin this new year by an honest dealing with ourselves, asking ourselves this question, "What am I living for?" And if the answer, first of all, be, as, of course, it will be—the accomplishment of nearer and necessary aims, such as the conduct of our business, the cultivating of our understandings, the love and peace of our homes, then let us press the investigation a little further, and say, What then? Suppose I make a fortune, what then? Suppose I get the position I am striving for, what then? Suppose I cultivate my understanding and win the knowledge that I am nobly striving after, what

then? Let us not cease to ask the question, until we can say, "Thy aim, O Lord, is my aim, and I press toward the mark," the only mark which will make life noble, elastic, stable, and blessed, that I "may be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith." For this we have all been made, guided, redeemed. If we carry this treasure out of life we shall carry all that is worth carrying. If we fail in this we fail altogether, whatever be our so-called success. There is one mark, one only, and every arrow that does not hit that target is wasted and spent in vain.

II.—Secondly, let me say, concentrate all effort on this one aim.

"This one thing I do," says the Apostle, "I press toward the mark." That aim is the one which God has in view in all circumstances and arrangements. Therefore, obviously, it is one which may be pursued in all of these, and may be sought whatsoever we are doing. All occupations, except only sin, are consistent with this highest aim. It needs not that we should seek any remote or cloistered form of life, nor shear off any legitimate and common interests, but in them all we may be seeking for the one thing, the moulding of our characters into the shapes that are pleasing to Him. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life"; wherever the outward days of my life may be passed. Whatever we are doing, in business, in shop, at a study table, in the kitchen, in the nursery, by the road, in the house, we may still have the supreme aim in view, that from all our work

there may come growth in character and in likeness to Jesus Christ.

Only, to keep this supreme aim clear, there will be required far more frequent and resolute effort for what the old mystics used to call "recollection" than we are accustomed to put forth. It is hard, amidst the din of business, and whilst yielding to other lower, legitimate impulses and motives, to set this supreme one high above them all. But it is possible, if only we will do two things, keep ourselves close to God, and be prepared to surrender much, laying our own wills, our own fancies, purposes, eager hopes and plans in His hands, and asking Him to help us, that we may never lose sight of the harbour light, because of any tossing waves that rise between us and it, nor may ever be so swallowed up in ends, which are only means after all, as to lose sight of the only end which is an end in itself. But for the attainment of this aim in any measure, the concentration of all our powers upon it is absolutely needful. If you want to bore a hole you take a sharp point; you can do nothing with a blunt one. Every flight of wild ducks in the sky will tell you the form that is most likely to secure the maximum of motion with the minimum of effort. The wedge is that which pierces through all the loosely-compacted textures against which it is pressed. Roman strategy forced the way of the legion through loose-ordered ranks of barbarian foes by arraying it in that wedgelike form. So we, if we are to advance, must gather ourselves together and put a point upon our lives by compaction and concentration of effort and energy on the one purpose. The conquering word is, "This one thing I do." The

difference between the amateur and the artist is that the one pursues an art by spurts, as a *parergon*—a thing that is done in the intervals of other occupations—and that the other makes it his life's business. There are a great many amateur Christians amongst us, who pursue the Christian life by fits and starts. If you want to be a Christian after God's pattern—and unless you are you are scarcely a Christian at all—you have to make it your business, to give the same attention, the same concentration, the same unwavering energy to it, which you do to your trade. The man of one book, the man of one idea, the man of one aim is the formidable and the successful man. People will call you a fanatic; never mind. Better be a fanatic and get what you aim at, which is the highest thing, than be so broad that, like a stream spreading itself out over miles of mud, there is no scour in it anywhere, no current, and therefore stagnation and death. Gather yourselves together, and, amidst all side issues and nearer aims, keep this in view as the aim to which all are to be subservient—that, "whether I eat or drink, or whatsoever I do, I may do all to the glory of God." Let sorrow and joy, trade and profession, study and business, house and wife and children and all home joys, be the means by which you may become like the Master who has died for this end, that we may become partakers of His holiness.

III.—Pursue this end with a wise forgetfulness.

"Forgetting the things that are behind." The art of forgetting has much to do with the blessedness and power of every life. Of course, when the Apostle says 'Forgetting the things that are behind," he is think-

ing of the runner, who has no time to cast his eye over his shoulder to mark the steps already trod. He does not mean, of course, to tell us that we are so to cultivate obliviousness as to let God's mercies to us "lie, forgotten in unthankfulness, or without praises die." Nor does he mean to tell us that we are to deny ourselves the solace of remembering the mercies which may, perhaps, have gone from us. Memory may be like the calm radiance that fills the western sky from a sun that has set, sad and yet sweet, melancholy and lovely. But he means that we should so forget as, by the oblivion, to strengthen our concentration.

So I would say, let us remember, and yet forget, our past failures and faults. Let us remember them in order that the remembrance may cultivate in us a wise chastening of our self-confidence. Let us remember where we were foiled, in order that we may be the more careful of that place hereafter. If we know that upon any road we fell into ambushes, "not once nor twice," like the old king of Israel, we should guard ourselves against passing by that road again. He who has not learned, by the memory of his past failures, humility and wise government of his life, and wise avoidance of places where he is weak, is an incurable fool.

But let us forget our failures, in so far as these might paralyze our hopes, or make us fancy that future success is impossible where past failures frown. Ebenezer was a field of defeat before it rang with the hymns of victory. And there is no place in your past life where you have been shamefully baffled and beaten, but there, and in that, you may yet be victori-

ous. Never let the past limit your hopes of the possibilities; nor your confidence in the certainties and victories, of the future. And if ever you are tempted to say to yourselves, "I have tried it so often, and so often failed, that it is no use trying any more; I am beaten and I throw up the sponge," remember Paul's wise exhortation, and "forgetting the things that are behind . . . press toward the mark."

In like manner I would say, remember and yet forget past successes and achievements. Remember them for thankfulness, remember them for hope, remember them for counsel and instruction, but forget them when they tend, as all that we accomplish does tend, to make us fancy that little more remains to be done; and forget them when they tend, as all that we accomplish ever does tend, to make us think that such and such things are our line, and of other virtues and graces and achievements of culture and of character, that these are not our line, and not to be won by us.

"Our line!" Astronomers take a thin thread from a spider's web and stretch it across their object-glasses to measure stellar magnitudes. Just as is the spider's line in comparison with the whole shining surface of the sun across which it is stretched, so is what we have already attained to the boundless might and glory of that to which we may come. Nothing short of the full measure of the likeness of Jesus Christ is the measure of our possibilities.

There is a mannerism in Christian life, as there is in everything else, which is to be avoided, if we would grow into perfection. There was a great artist in a past century who never could paint a picture without

a brown tree in the foreground. We have all our "brown trees," which we think we can do well, and these limit our ambition to secure other gifts which God is ready to bestow upon us. So, "forget the things that are behind." Cultivate a wise obliviousness of past sorrows, past joys, past failures, past gifts, past achievements, in so far as these might limit the audacity of your hopes and the energy of your efforts.

IV.—So, lastly, pursue the aim with a wise, eager reaching forward.

The Apostle employs a graphic word here, which is only very partially expressed by that "reaching forth." It contains a condensed picture which it is scarcely possible to put into any one expression. "Reaching out over" is the full though clumsy rendering of the word; and it gives us the picture of the runner with his whole body thrown forward, his hand extended, and his eye reaching even further than his hand, in eager anticipation of the mark and the prize. So we are to live, with continual reaching out of confidence, clear recognition, and eager desire to make the unattained our own.

What is that which gives an element of nobleness to the lives of great idealists, whether they be poets, artists, students, thinkers, or what not? Mainly this, that they see the unattained burning ever so clearly before them that all the attained seems as nothing in their eyes. And so life is saved from commonplace, is happily stung into fresh effort, is redeemed from flagging, monotony, and weariness.

The measure of our attainments may be fairly estimated by the extent to which the unattained is clear in our sight. A man down in the valley sees the nearer shoulder of the hill, and he thinks it the top. Reaching the shoulder he sees all the heights that lie beyond rising above him. Endeavour is better than success. It is more to see the Alpine heights yet unscaled than it is to have risen so far as we have done. They who thus have a boundless future before them have an endless source of inspiration, of energy, of buoyancy granted to them.

No man has such an absolutely boundless vision of the future which may be his, as we have if we are Christian people, as we ought to be. Only we can thus look forward. For all others a blank wall stretches at the end of life, against which hopes, when they strike, fall back stunned and dead. But for us the wall may be overleaped, and, living by the energy of a boundless hope, we, and only we, can lay ourselves down to die, and say *then*, "Reaching forth unto the things that are before."

So, dear friends, make God's aim your aim; concentrate your life's efforts upon it; pursue it with a wise forgetfulness; pursue it with an eager confidence of anticipation that shall not be put to shame. Remember that God reaches His aim for you by giving to you Jesus Christ, and that you can only reach it by accepting the Christ who is given, and being found in Him. Then the years will take away nothing from us which it is not gain to lose. They will neither weaken our energy nor flatten our hopes nor dim our confidence, and at the last we shall reach

the mark, and, as we touch it, we shall find dropping on our surprised and humble heads the crown of life which they receive who have so run, not as uncertainly, but doing this one thing, pressing towards the mark for the prize.

XVII.

God's Scrutiny Longed For.

"SEARCH me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."—PSALM CXXXIX. 23, 24.

HIS psalm begins with perhaps the grandest contemplation of the Divine Omniscience that was ever put into words. It is easy to pour out platitudes upon such a subject, but the Psalmist does not content himself with generalities. He gathers all the rays, as it were, into one burning point, and focusses them upon himself. "O Lord! Thou hast searched *me*, and known *me*." All the more remarkable, then, is it that the psalm should end with asking God to do what it began with declaring that He does. He knows us each, altogether—whether we like it or not; whether we try to hinder it or not; whether we remember it or not. Singular, therefore, is it to find this prayer as the very climax of all the Psalmist's contemplation. The "searching" which was spoken of at the beginning is not so profound or effective as that which is desired at the end. It is a process which has for its issue the cleansing of all the evil that is beheld. The prayer of the text is, in fact, the

yearning of a devout soul for purity. I simply wish to consider the series of petitions here, in the hope that we may catch something of their spirit, and that some faint echo of them may sound in our desires. My purpose, then, will be best accomplished if I follow the words of the text, and look at these petitions in the order in which they stand.

I.—Note, then, first, the longing for the searching of God's eye.

Now, the word which is here rendered "search" is a very emphatic and picturesque one. It means to dig deep. God is prayed, as it were, to make a section into the Psalmist, and lay bare his inmost nature, as men do in a railway cutting, layer after layer, going ever deeper down till the bed-rock is reached. "Search me"—dig into me, bring the deep-lying parts to light —"and know my heart"; the centre of my personality, my inmost self.

That is the prayer, not of fancied fitness to stand investigation, but of lowly acknowledgment. In other words, it is really a form of confession. "Search me. I know Thou wilt find evil, but still—search me!" It seems to me that there are two main ideas in this petition, on each of which I touch briefly.

One is, that it is a glad recognition of a fact which is very terrible to many hearts. The conception of God as "knowing me altogether," down to the very roots of my being, is either the most blessed or the most unwelcome thought, according to my conception of what His heart to me is. If I think of Him, as so many of us do, as simply an "austere man" who "gathers where he did not straw," and reaps where he did not sow; if my thought of God is mainly that of

an investigator and a judge, with pure eyes and rigid judgment, then I shall be more ignorant of myself, and more confident in myself, than the most of men are when they bethink themselves, if I do not feel that I shrink up like a sensitive plant's leaf when a finger touches it, and would fain curl myself together, and hide from His eye something that I know lurks and poisons, at the centre of my being.

The gaoler's eye at the slit in the wall of the solitary prisoner's cell is a constant terror to the man who knows that it may be upon him at every moment, and does not know where the eyehole is, or when the merciless eye may be at it. But if we love one another, we do not shrink from opening out our inward baseness to each other. We can venture to tell those that are dear to us, as our own hearts, the things that lie in our own hearts, and make them black and ugly in all eyes but love's; or, if we cannot venture to do it wholly, at all events we do it more fully, and more willingly, and with more of something that is almost pleasure in the very act of confession, in proportion as we are bound by the sacred ties of love to the recipient of the confession. There is a joy, and a blessedness deeper than joy, in discovering ourselves, even our unworthy selves, when we know that the eye that looks is a loving eye.

If, then, we have rightly conceived of our relation to Him, that infinite Lover of all our hearts, who looks "with other eyes than ours, and makes allowance for us all," there will be a certain blessedness, almost like joy, in turning ourselves inside out before Him; and in feeling that every corner of our hearts lies naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have

to do. "Search me, O God," is the voice of confident love, which is sure of the love that contemplates the sinner.

And for us Christian people, to whom all these attributes of Deity are gathered together and brought very near our hearts and our experiences in the Person of our brother Christ, the thought of such knowledge of us becomes still more blessed. Just as the Apostle, who was conscious of many sins, could say to his Master, not in petulance, but in deeply-moved confidence, "Thou knowest all things! Why dost Thou ask me questions? Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest, notwithstanding my denials, that I love Thee," so may we turn to Jesus Christ, who knows what is in men, and who knows each man, and be sure that the eye which looks upon our unworthiness pities our sinfulness, and is ready to bear it all away. There is a deeper gladness in pouring out our hearts to our loving Lord than in locking them, in sullen silence, with the vain conceit that we thereby hide ourselves from Him. Make a clean breast of your evil, and you will find that the act has in it a blessedness unique and poignant. "Pour out your hearts before Him, O ye people, God is a refuge for us."

This prayer is also an expression of absolute willingness to submit to the searching process. God is represented in my text as seeking into the secrets of a man's heart, not that God may know, but that the man may know. By His spirit He will come into the innermost corners of our nature, if this prayer is a real expression of our desire. And there the illumination of His presence will flash light into all the dark corners of our experience and of our personality

We cannot afford to be in ignorance of these. Pestilence lurks in the unventilated, unlighted, uncleansed corners of a neglected nature. It is only on condition of the light of God's convincing spirit being cast into every corner of our being that we shall be able to overcome and annihilate the creeping swarms of microscopic sins that are there, minute, but mighty in their myriads to destroy a man's soul. "Search me" is the expression of a penitence that knows itself to be full of evil, that does not know all the evil of which it is full, that needs enlightenment, that desires deliverance, that is sure of the love that looks, and that so spreads itself, as a bleacher spreads some piece of stained cloth in the gracious sunshine and sprinkles it with the pure water of heaven, that all the stains may melt away.

It is useless to ask God to search us if we lock our hearts against His searching. The mere natural exercise, if I may so say, of the Divine attribute of Omniscience we cannot hinder. He knows us thereby altogether, whether we like it or not; but the "searching" of my text is one which He cannot put in force without our consent. We have to confess our sins unto the Lord, ere this kind of Divine scrutiny can be brought to bear. By His natural Omniscience, He knows them altogether, but the seeing which is preparatory to destroying them depends on our willingness to submit ourselves to the often painful process by which He drags our sins to light.

Do you want Him to come and search your hearts, and tell you in your spirits what He has found there? Do you desire to know your hidden evil? Then keep close to Him, and tell Him what the sin is which you

know to be sin; and ask Him to show you what the sins are which, as yet, you have not grown up to the height of understanding and acknowledging.

II.—Next, there follows the longing for the Divine testing of our thoughts.

Now you will have observed, I suppose, that in the second clause of my text, "try me, and know my thoughts," the result of the investigation is somewhat different from that of the previous clause. The "searching" issued in a Divine knowledge of the heart; the "trying," or testing, issues in a Divine knowledge of the thoughts. The distinction between these two, in the Biblical use of the expression, is not precisely the same as in our modern popular speech. We are accustomed to talk of the heart as being the seat of emotions, affections, feelings, whereas we relegate thoughts to the head. But Scripture does not quite take that metaphorical view. In it the heart is the centre of personal being, and out of it there come, not only emotions and loves, but "thoughts and intents." The difference, then, between these two, "heart" and "thoughts," is this, the one is the workshop and the other is the product. The heart is the place where the thoughts are elaborated. So you see the process of the Psalmist's prayer is from the centre a little outwards, first the inmost self, and then the "thoughts," meaning thereby the whole web of activities, both intellectual and emotional, of which the heart, in his sense of the word, is the seat and source.

In like manner as the field of investigation is somewhat shifted in the second petition, so the manner of investigation is correspondingly different. "Search" is the Divine scrutiny of the inner man by the eye;

"test" is the trial, as metals are proved by a fiery furnace.

So, then, the innermost man is searched by the Divine knowledge, and the thoughts which the innermost man produces are tested by the Divine providence. And this second petition is for a trial by facts, by external agencies, of the true nature and character of our purposes, desires, designs, intentions, as well as of our affections and loves and joys. That is to say, this second prayer submits absolutely to any discipline, fiery and fierce and bitter, by which the true character of a man's activities may be made clear to himself. Oh! it is a prayer easily offered; hard to stand by. It is a prayer often answered, in ways that drive us almost to despair. It means, Do anything with me, put me into any seven-fold heated furnace of sorrow, do anything that will melt my hardness, and run off my dross, which Thy great ladle will then skim away, that the surface may be clear, and the substance without alloy.

Do you pray that prayer, brother, knowing all that it means, and being willing to take the answer in forms that may rack your heart, and sadden your whole lives? If you are wise, you will. Better to go crippled into life than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into hell fire! Better to be saved, though maimed, than to be entire and lost.

"Try me." It is an awful prayer. Let us not offer it lightly, or unadvisedly. If we are wise it will be our inmost desire. And when the answer comes, and sorrows fall, do not let us murmur, do not let us kick, do not let us wonder, but let us say, "Thou art a God that hearest prayer," and "I will glorify God in the

fires." Then "the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise and honour and glory."

III.—The next petition of my text is a longing for the casting out of evil.

"See if there be any wicked way in me." Now, that *if* is not the "if" of doubt whether any such "way" is in the man, but it is the "if" of consciousness that there are such, though what they are he may not clearly discern. And so, it is the "if" of humility—knowing that he is not justified because he knows nothing against himself—and not the "if" of presumption.

I have only time to observe here, in a word or two, what would well deserve more expanded treatment, and that is, the very striking and significant expression here employed for this evil way which the Psalmist desires to be detected, that it may be cast out. The word rendered "wicked"—or, more properly, wickedness—is literally "forced labour," which was, in old times, and still is in some countries, laid upon the inhabitants at the command of authority; and then, because forced labour is grievous labour, it comes to mean sorrow. So the "way of wickedness" that the Psalmist feels is in him is a way of compulsory service, and a way that leads to sorrow. That is to say, all sin is slavery, and all sin leads to a bitter and a bad end, and its fruit is death. And so, because he feels that his better self is in bondage, and shudderingly apprehends that the course which he pursues can only end in bitterness and misery, he turns to God and asks Him that He would enlighten

him as to what these fatal courses are. "See if there be any way of wickedness in me," beause he is quite sure that the evil which God sees God will help him to overcome.

Ah, friends, we all have such ways deeply lodged within us, and we do not always know that we have; but if we will turn ourselves to Him, He will prevent our condemning ourselves in things that we allow; and, by increasing the sensitiveness of our consciences, He will teach us that many things which we did not know to be wrong are harmful.

As soon as we learn that they are, He will help us to cast them out. God has nothing to do with our evil but to fight against it. Be sure of this, that whatsoever evil in us He thus searches and shows us, is shown us that we may fling it from us. He goes down into the cellars of our hearts, with the candle of His Spirit in His hand, in order that He may lay hold of all the explosives there, and, having drenched them so that they shall not catch fire, may cast them clean out, so that they may not blow us to destruction.

IV.—The last petition of my text is for guidance in "the everlasting way."

The "ways of wickedness" are in us; the "way everlasting" we need to be led into. That is to say, naturally, we incline to evil; it must be the Divine hand and the Divine Spirit that lead our feet in the paths of righteousness. When we ask Him to "guide us in the way everlasting," we ask that we may know what is duty, and that we may incline to do it. And He answers it by the gift of His Divine Spirit, by the quickening of our consciences, by bringing nearer to our hearts the great Example who

has left us His footsteps as a legacy that we may tread in them.

Whosoever walks in Christ's footsteps is walking in "the way everlasting." For that path is rightly so named which leads to eternal blessedness. It is everlasting, too, inasmuch as nothing of human effort or work abides except that which is in conformity with the will of God, and inasmuch as it, and it alone, is not broken short off by death, but runs, borne upon one mighty arch that spans the gorge, clean across the black abyss, and continues straight on in the same course, only with a swifter upward gradient, through all the ages of eternity. The man who here has lived for God will live yonder as he has lived here, only more completely and more joyously for ever. "A highway shall be there, and a way, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads."

XVIII.

Christ's Traders.

"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come."—Luke xix. 13.

THE Evangelist is careful to note the occasion for this remarkable parable. It was spoken in order to damp down the excited hopes of Christ's followers and of the crowd, occasioned by our Lord's final journey to Jerusalem. They "thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear"; that at last this Messiah was about to make a dash for temporal sovereignty, such as would meet their desires. He tells them this story which so significantly, though in veiled fashion, yet very clearly to a seeing eye, asserts His dignity, foretells His departure, hints at the long period of His absence, and prescribes the tasks of His servants.

"A certain nobleman," or, as the word literally rendered would be, a "well-born man"—there speaks the veiled consciousness of Divine Sonship—"went into a far country," therefore on a long journey, "to receive for himself a kingdom," as successive members of the Herod family had been accustomed to do, going to Rome, to get confirmation of their authority, "and

to return." And he left behind him, says the narrative, two sets of people, servants to work and rebellious citizens.

I have nothing to do with the latter class this morning, but I wish to turn to the imagery of my task as suggesting the work of the servants whilst the Master is gone.

Now we are to observe that the word "occupy," in our Authorized Version, is by no means—now, at all events—an adequate representation of the original. A compound form of the same word is rightly rendered in the fifteenth verse, "gain by trading"; and unquestionably the Revised Version gives the true meaning when, instead of "occupy," it reads "*trade* ye herewith till I come." The metaphor, then, is that of men to whom has been entrusted a capital not their own, and who are sent to do their best with it.

I.—Note, then, first, the stock-in-trade.

Now you will remember that there is another parable, so singularly like this one that superficial readers, and some readers who ought not to have been superficial, have gone the length of supposing that the two are simply versions of one. I mean the parable of the pounds in Matthew's Gospel. But there are, along with the resemblances of the two, several important points of difference, which enter into the very structure and significance of each, and contain the key to their interpretation. The two points of difference are the magnitude of the gift bestowed, and the fact that in the one parable the gift varies in each case, and in the other is identical in all. In our story the men get a pound a piece; in the other story they get a varying number of talents, beginning with ten, and tapering

down to one. Now, then, these two points, the smallness of the stock and its uniformity, are essential features in the significance of this parable.

What is there that all Christian men have in common? The answer may be, as often has been supposed, salvation, grace, or the like; but it is only very partially true that all Christian men have an equal measure of such gifts, for these vary indefinitely, according to the faith and receptivity of the possessor. But there is something which all Christian people have equally, though they do not all make the same use of it, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation, the great truths of His mission, character, and work. And that, as I take it—the Word, or, to use a more frequent phrase, the Gospel—is the "pound" which every real Christian has equally. Remember Paul's word, which is only another phase of the same thought, where he speaks about "that good deposit committed to our trust." And remember also his frequent expressions, such as "I was put in trust of the Gospel," "the Gospel was committed to my charge," as to a steward, and I think you will see the meaning of the emblem. All Christians have the same gift committed to their charge.

But then, is it not very strange that, if that be at all the significance of the figure, our Lord should select a very small amount as representing it? A talent, whether it was a talent of gold or of silver—which may be questionable—was an immense sum. A pound was worth about six pounds of our English money, a very small amount for a man to set up in business with; or for an aspirant to a throne to give to his servants. Pretenders to crowns not yet won

are not usually very flush of money, and the smallness of the gift may be part of the propriety of the narrative.

But how can we think that Jesus Christ would have represented the gift of His Word as a *little* stock-in-trade with which to go out? Well! fling yourself back to the time. Think of these forlorn men, left by their Master, and standing there face to face with an antagonistic world, with its treasures of poetry, philosophy, eloquence, literature, with its banded antagonisms, with its dead weight of indifference, What have they to meet all these with? One unlettered message, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." By the side of the wealth that was stored in that wonderful literature of Greece, what was the disciples' stock-in-trade? Nothing but one poor word; and with that word they shook the world. The "pound," small as it seemed was more than all the wealth hived in the treasure-houses of the poets and orators and philosophers of Greece, and than the might of Rome. It was a little gift, but it was sufficient. The gladiator was sent into the arena to face the lions unarmed, and with a poor rod in his hand, but he conquered. The foolishness of preaching was more than a match for the gathered wisdom of the world.

The servants had but their pound; they had to be contented, therefore, with dealing in a very small way. Little economies, and hard work, and slow savings had to be the rule of their trade. There are men in Manchester to-day who began with the traditional half-crown, and have made it the basis of a large fortune. Christ sent His Church into the world with a similar

slender endowment, judged from the world's point of view. All of us have that gift. Let us see that we are not ashamed of it. David's five smooth stones out of the brook-bed, lodged in a rude leather sling, with a bit of string tied at the two ends of it, are fit to whiz into the forehead of any Goliath and lay him flat upon the plain. The Lord went to seek a kingdom, and all that He had to leave to His servants was one poor pound. That is their stock-in-trade.

II.—Now, secondly, notice the trading.

"Trade ye herewith." That is a distinct and definite command. It covers, no doubt, the whole area of life, and goes down to its depths as well. In this trading is, I suppose, included the whole of the outward life, which is to be shaped by the principles and motives contained in the message of the Gospel. Thus to live is our business in the world. These men got their gift, not only to live upon it—of course they had to do that too—but to do the best they could with it by their faithfulness and their diligence. It remains for ever true that wheresoever men do honestly and conscientiously, and with a fixed and continuous determination, apply the principles of Christianity to their daily life, in great or small things, their grasp of the principles and motives is increased, and the "pound" becomes more in their hands, though they add nothing to it, but only penetrate deeper into its significance and its value.

But whilst thus the Christian life, influenced and dominated by Christian motives and principles drawn from the Gospel, is the general meaning of this trading, there is one special direction in which, as I think, the stress of the parable is meant to go, and that is,

the diffusion by the servants of the King of the message of His love. I take it that, whilst the whole sweep of Christian life may be included in the commandment, manifestly the main idea that lies in it is—spread the Word which you have received, and become apostles and missionaries of the truth that has been entrusted to your charge. This trading is laid as an obligation upon all Christians, by the fact of possession, by the consideration of the purpose for which the pound is given, and by the distinct and definite command of the Lord Himself.

It is laid upon us as an obligation by the fact of possession. That is true about all our gifts. It is most true about all our convictions. It is truest of all about our religious convictions. For a man may have many opinions which bring with them no obligation to diffuse them, and there may be many thoughts and beliefs in my heart which do not knock at the door of my lips and demand expression in proportion to the depth of my own personal conviction. But no man, who really has, in his heart, lodged deep and hidden, the Word of God, can be dumb. "Thy Word have I hid in my heart" says the Psalmist; and then again, he says, "I have not hid Thy righteousness from before the great congregation." If there is a deep personal possession of that Gospel for ourselves, there cannot fail to result therefrom the sense of obligation, and of impulse and necessity to impart it. The "pound" burns a hole in your pockets, according to the old saying, unless you take it out and trade with it. And I, for my part, venture to say that I look, if not with suspicion, at least with profound conviction of its shallowness, at the Christianity of any man who

feels nothing of the obligation which it lays upon him to communicate it to others.

The obligation results from the very purpose of the gift. The king gave these men their pound each, not that they might live upon it, but that, living upon it, their life and their stock might both be used for the increase of his wealth. You very much mistake your own importance in the world, and in Christ's Kingdom, if you think that you were saved—if you are saved—only in order that you might be safe. You were saved for that, but also in order that, through you, other people might be saved.

Now, Christians, have you realized that? And do you work it out in your life? The purpose of the pound is trading; and you will not be acquitted of unfaithfulness and embezzlement if, when the audit day comes, you say, "The pound? the Gospel? Oh! I lived upon it." Yes! but did you use the life that you drew from it for the purpose of spreading that great Name?

The obligation rises from the distinct commands of the Master, which commandments are not grievous. Oh! brethren, if we had more deeply communed with the Lord who is love, we should better understand that His commandments, which are the expressions of His will, are prerogatives and privileges. There are many of us, I am sure, who think, "Well! It is a Christian man's duty to do something for the spread of the Gospel. It is a heavy burden. I wish I could diminish it. I will do as little of it as is consistent with a reputable position, and as little as my conscience will let me off with"! "To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this *grace* given, that I

should preach amongst the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." It is privilege, honour, may be a source of joy, and will be a source of glory in the heavens, if we faithfully do the work.

The metaphor on which I am now speaking suggests also the way in which the work has to be done. Make a business of it. That is one plain conclusion from the imagery of our text. If once we could get it into our heads and consciences that it is quite as much our business in life to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is to go to our daily occupation, the whole Church and the world would be blessed and revolutionized. Make a business of it. There are here and there men who do recognize this as their duty. I do not mean men like me, who make a profession of it, nor others who make a trade of it. That is entirely a different thing. I mean men who may be merchants, or shopkeepers, women who may be in any circumstance of life, but who recognize that the main thing for which they are in the world is the fuller reception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in all its quickening and impelling power, into their own natures; and consequently the completer raying out of it from themselves into a darkened world. Make a business of it, realize it as your task. The Church has been playing at it, and a great many of us have not even been doing that much.

We need a far more serious devotion of ourselves to the task than characterizes most of us. Bring the common virtues and qualities, which you know to be essential to success in any walk of life to bear upon this your highest Christian duty,—common sense, adaptation of means to ends, persistence, diligence,

looking out for opportunities to open new markets; and all the other qualities which you honour so highly in Portland Street and Mosley Street. You have another region in which they may profitably be applied, and that is, the doing of Christ's work in the world. But if you have such a huge millwheel to drive that the sluice and the lade need to be of such dimensions that they divert all the water from the stream, except one little miserable trickle amongst the stones, no wonder that the progress of the Christian Church, in the hands of such unfaithful servants, is the miserably slow thing that it is. Make your business the spread of Christ's name, and do it as you do your business.

III.—Lastly, note the audit.

"Till I come," or, as another reading has it, more difficult but very significant, "whilst I am coming"; as if the coming of the Lord was in progress all through the ages of His absence, and He was drawing ever nearer and nearer. Which of these two may be the accurate reading does not much affect my present purpose. The point is that there comes a time when the head of the concern goes round to all the branch agencies and gets the books, and sees what has been done in his absence, and allots results accordingly.

Mark that the servants tell their own story. That is a solemn thought that, however we may cover up our idleness to-day, and whatever excuses we may have for not doing the Master's will, in the matter of diffusing His name throughout the world, there comes a time when all these will melt away, and the man himself will accurately know and accurately narrate what his life has really been, and what the upshot of it all has

come to. "So, then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Note that there turn out to be varieties in the profits. The one pound makes ten pounds, five pounds, *no* pounds. If these varieties in profits (which, I suppose, may be put into modern language as varying measures of what is so often misunderstood and sought in questionable ways—success) have resulted from varying circumstances, over which the man has no control, they will not be taken into account in the final award. What Christ rewards is not success, but diligence. And if we are set to work in a little corner, the man who fills half a continent with his fame, and whose eloquence and spiritual power has revivified a dying Church or generation, will get no more than us little men in the far-off corners who did their best where God had put them. It is not variety of results, except in so far as that variety is determined by variety of consecration and diligence, that makes a variation in the issue. But in so far as there is this variety in diligence, it *does* make a difference. I wish that belief held a larger place than it does in the minds and in the preaching of the Church of this day. We are far too much accustomed to think of the salvation of the soul and the reward of a future life as being one dead level, whereas, in fact, it is full of inequalities of height, and some peaks tower above the lower ones. There is such a thing as salvation by fire, and such a thing as salvation in fulness. It is not all the same, brethren, and it will not be all the same for you and me in that future life, whether we have traded with our pound or hidden it in a napkin; and whether

our diligence has made our pound into ten or only into five.

What may be hidden beneath the wonderful words of the promise, with which the audit closes, is more than any of us can guess. "Have thou authority over ten cities." At all events, that means an all but infinitely higher sphere and form of service granted to the diligent traders. Here, if I might stick by the metaphors of my text, we keep a little shop in a back street with a very small stock-in-trade in the little window, and very slender profits in the till. Yonder we shall be His viceroys and lieutenants; and somehow or other share in the possession and the administration of His royalty.

Or, if I might put it into the grand rolling words of John Milton, "They undoubtedly, that by their labours, counsels, and prayers have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall, above the inferior orders of the blessed, receive the regal addition of principalities, powers, and thrones into their glorious titles."

XIX.

Form and Power.

"Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."—2 Tim. iii. 5.

N this, his last letter and legacy, the Apostle Paul is much occupied with the anticipation of coming evils. It is most natural that the faithful watchman, knowing that the hour of relieving guard was very near at hand, should eagerly scan the horizon in quest of the enemies that might approach when he was no longer there to deal with them. Old men are apt to take a gloomy view of coming days, but the frequent references to the corruptions of the Church which occur in this letter are a great deal more than an old man's pessimism. They were warnings, which were amply vindicated by the history of the post-apostolic age of the Church, which was the seed-bed of all manner of corruptions, and they point to permanent dangers, the warning against which is as needful for us as for any period.

The Apostle draws here a very gloomy picture of the corrupt forms of Christianity, the advent of which he tremblingly anticipated. I do not mean to enter at all upon the dark catalogue of the vices which he

enumerates, except to point out that its beginning, middle, and end are very significant. It begins with "lovers of self"—that is the root of all forms of sin. In the centre there stands "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God"; and at the end, summing up the whole, are the words of our text, "having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

I do not suppose that these words need much explanation. "Godliness," in the New Testament, means not only the disposition which we call piety, but the conduct which flows from it, and which we may call practical religion. The form or outward appearance of that we all understand. But what is "denying the power thereof"? It does not consist in words, but in deeds. In these latter epistles we find "denying" frequently used as equivalent to *abjuring*, renouncing, casting off. For instance, in a passage singularly and antithetically parallel to that of my text, we read "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," which simply means throwing off their dominion. And, in like manner, the denial here is no verbal rejection of the principles of the Gospel, which would be inconsistent with the notion of still retaining the form of godliness; but it is the practical renunciation of the power, which is inherent in all true godliness, of moulding the life and character—the practical renunciation of that, even whilst preserving a superficial, unreal appearance of being subject to it.

This, then, being the explanation, and the rough outline of the state of things which the Apostle contemplates as hurrying onwards to corrupt the church

after his departure, let us look at some of the thoughts connected with it.

I.—Observe the sad frequency of such a condition. Wherever any great cause or principle is first launched into the world, it evokes earnest enthusiasm, and brings men to heroisms of consecration and service. And so, when Christianity was first preached, there was less likelihood than now of its attracting to itself men who were not in earnest, but were mere formalists. But, even in the Apostolic Church, there were an Ananias and a Sapphira; a Simon Magus and a Demas. As years go on, and primitive enthusiasms die out, and the cause which was once all freshly radiant and manifestly heaven-born becomes an earthly institution, there is a growing tendency to gather round it all sorts of superficial, half-and-half adherents. Whatsoever is respectable, and whatsoever is venerable, and whatsoever is customary will be sure to have attached to it a mass of loose and nominal adherents; and the Gospel has had its full share of such.

I was talking not very long ago to a leading man belonging to another denomination than my own; and he quietly, as a matter of course, said, "Our communicants are so many hundred thousands. I reckon that a *quarter* of them, or thereabouts, are truly spiritual men!" And he seemed to think that nobody would question the correctness of the calculation and the proportion. Why, "Christendom" is largely a mass of pagans masquerading as Christians.

And every church has its full share of such people; loose adherents, clogs upon all movement, who bring down the average of warmth, like the great icebergs

that float in the Atlantic and lower the temperature of the summer all over Europe. They make consecration "eccentric"; they make consistent, out-and-out Christian living "odd," unlike the ordinary thing, and they pull down the spirituality of the Church almost to the level of the world. Every communion of so-called Christian men has its full share of these.

Brethren, the members of *this* church and congregation are not exempt. The same thing applies to us. Every church of God on the face of the earth has a little core of earnest Christians, who live the life, and a great envelope and surrounding of men who, as my text says, have the form of godliness, and practically deny the power thereof. Widespread, and all but universal, this condition of things is. And so let each of us say, "Lord! Is it I?"

II.—Think, next, of the underground working of this evil.

These people about whom Paul is speaking in my text were, I suppose, mostly, though by no means exclusively, conscious pretenders to what they did not possess. But the number of hypocrites, in the full sense of the word, is amazingly small, and the men whom you would brand as most distinctly so, if you came to talk to them, would amaze you, when you found how entirely ignorant they were of the fact that they were dramatizing and pretending to piety, and that there was next to no reality of it in them. A very little bit of gold, beaten out very thin, will cover over, with a semblance of value, an enormous area. And many men beat out the little modicum of sincerity that they have so very thin that it covers, and gives a deceptive

appearance of brilliancy and solidity to, an enormous amount of windy flatulence and mere pretence. Hypocrites, in the rude vulgar sense of the word, are, I was going to say, as rare as, but I will say a great deal rarer than, thorough-going and intensely earnest and sincere Christians. These men, the precursors of Gnostic heresies and a hundred others, had no notion that their picture was like this. And if they had been shown Paul's grim catalogue they would have said, "Oh! a gross caricature, and not the least like me." And that is what a great many other men do as well.

But it is unconscious hypocrisy, unconscious sliding away from the basis of reality on to the slippery basis of pretence and appearance, that I want to say a word or two about. The worse a man is, the less he knows it. The more completely a professing Christian has lost his hold of the substance and is clinging only to the form, the less does he suspect that this indictment has any application to him. The very sign and symptom of spiritual degeneracy and corruption is unconsciousness; as the great champion of Israel, when his locks were cropped in Delilah's lap, went out to exercise his mighty limbs as at other times, and knew not, till he vainly tried feats which their ebbing strength was no longer equal to perform, that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. The more completely a man's limbs are frost-bitten the more comfortable and warm they are, and the less does he know it. If a man says, "Your text has no sort of application to me," he thereby shows that it has a very close application to him.

I need say little about the reasons for this uncon-

sciousness. We are all accustomed to take very lenient views, when we take any at all, of our own character; and the tendency of all conduct is to pull down conscience to the level of conduct, and to vindicate that conduct by biassed decisions of a partial conscience. And so I have no doubt that there are people in this congregation now listening quite complacently to my words, and thinking how well they fit that other man in that other pew there, from whom there has, without their knowing it, ebbed away, by slow, sad drops, almost all the life-blood of their Christianity. They are like some great tree that stands in the woods, fair to appearance, with solid bole and wide-spread leafage, and expanded branches, and yet the heart is out of it; and when the tempest comes, and it falls, everybody can look into the hollow trunk and see that for years it has been rotten.

Brethren, the underground enemies of our Christian earnestness are far more dangerous than its apparent and manifest antagonists; and there are many men amongst us who would repel with indignation an obvious assault against their godliness, who yield without resistance, and almost without consciousness, to the sly seductions of unsuspected evil. The arrow that flieth in darkness is more deadly than the pestilence that wasteth at noonday.

III.—Further, notice the ever-operating causes that produce this condition.

I suppose that one, at any rate, of the main examples of having this "form" was participation in the simple worship of the primitive Church. And although the phrase by no means refers merely to acts of worship, still that is one of the main fields in

which this evil is manifest. Many of us substitute outward connection with the Church for inward union with Jesus Christ. All external forms have a tendency to assert themselves, and to detain in themselves, instead of helping to rise above themselves, our poor sense-ridden natures. How many of us are there whose religion consists very largely in coming to this place, standing up when other people sing, seeming to unite in prayer and praise, perhaps participating in the sacred rites of the Church; but having most of our religion safely locked up in our pews along with our hymn-books when we leave the chapel, and waiting for us quietly, without troubling us, until next Sunday. We need outward forms of worship. It is a sign of our weakness that we do, but they are so full of danger that one sometimes wishes that they could be broken up and made fluent, and that, at least for a time, something else could be substituted for them.

Seeing that the purest and the simplest of forms may become like a dirty window, an obscuring medium which shuts out instead of lets in the light, it seems to me that the churches are wisest, which admit least of the dangerous element into their external worship, and try to have as little of form as may keep the spirit. I know that simple forms may be abused quite as much as elaborate ones. I know that a Quaker's meeting-house is often quite as much a house of formal and not of real communion as a Roman Catholic cathedral. Let us remember how full of dangers they all and always are. And let us be very sure that we do not substitute church membership, coming to chapel, going to prayer-meeting,

teaching in Sunday-schools, reading devout books, and the like, for inward submission to the power.

Another cause always operating is the tendency which all action of every kind has to escape from the dominion of its first motives, and to become merely mechanical and habitual. Habit is a most precious ally of goodness, but habitual goodness tends to become involuntary and mechanical goodness, and so to cease to be goodness at all. And the more that we can, in each given case, make each individual act of godliness, whether it be in worship or in practical life, the result of a fresh approach to the one central and legitimate impulse of the Christian life, the better it will be for ourselves. All great causes, as I was saying a moment or two ago, tend to pass from the dominion of impulse into that of use and wont and mere routine and our religion and practical godliness in daily life is apt to do that, as well as all our other actions.

And then, still further, there is the constant operation of earth and sense and present duties and pressing cares, which war against the reality and completeness of our submission to the power of godliness. Microscopically minute grains of sand in the aggregate bury the temples and the images of the gods in the Nile valley. The multitude of small cares and duties, which are blown upon us by every wind, have the effect of withdrawing us, unless we are continually watchful, from that one foundation of all good, the love of Jesus Christ felt in our daily lives. Unless we perpetually tighten our hold, it will loosen, by very weariness of the muscles. Unless the boat be firmly anchored, it will be drifted down the stream. Unless we take care, our Christian

life and earnestness will ooze out at our finger-tips, and we shall never know that it is gone. The world, our own weakness, our very tasks and duties, the pressure of circumstances, the sway of our senses, and the very habit of doing right—all of these may tend to make us mechanical and formal participators in the religious life, and unconscious hypocrites.

IV.—So, lastly, let me point you to the discipline which may avert this evil.

First and foremost, I would say, let us cherish a clear and continual recognition of the reality of the danger. Fore-warned is fore-armed. He that will take counsel of his own weakness, and be taught by God's Word how unreliable he himself is, and how strong the forces are which tend to throw his religion all to the surface, will thereby be, if not insured against the danger, at least made a great deal more competent to deal with it. "Blessed is the man that feareth always," and that knows how likely he is to go wrong unless he carefully seeks to keep himself right.

Rigid, habitual self-inspection, in the light of God's Word, is an all-important help to prevent this sliding into superficiality, of our Christian life. If what I was saying about the unconsciousness of decline is at all true, then most eloquently and impressively does it say to us all, "Watch! for you know not what may be going on underground unless you keep a continual carefulness of inspection." We should watch our own characters, the movement of our spiritual nature, and the effect and operation of our habits and of our participation in outward forms of Christianity, we should watch these as carefully as men

in the tropics look for snakes and scorpions in their clothing and their beds before they put them on, or get into them. In a country which is only preserved by the dykes from being swallowed up by the sea, the minutest inspection of the rampart, is the condition of security, for if there be a hole big enough for a mouse to creep through, the water will come in, and make a gap wide enough to drown a province, in a little while. And so, brethren, seeing that we have such dangers round about us, and that the most formidable of them all are powers that work in the dark, let us be very sure that our eyes have searched, as well as we can, the inmost corners of our lives, and that no lurking vermin lie beneath the unturned-up stones.

And then, lastly, and as that without which all else is vain, let us make continual and earnest and contrite efforts day by day, to renew and deepen our personal communion with Jesus Christ. He is the source of the power which godliness operates in our lives, and the closer we keep to Him the more it will flood our hearts and make us real, out-and-out Christians, and not shallow and self-deceived pretenders.

The tree that had nothing but leaves upon it hid its absence of fruit by its abundance of foliage. The Master came, as He comes to you and to me, seeking fruit, and if He finds it not, He will perpetuate the barrenness by His blasting word, "No fruit grow upon thee henceforward for ever."

XX.

Hid in Light.

"Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man: Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues."—Psalm xxxi. 20.

THE word rendered "presence" is literally "face," and the force of this very remarkable expression of confidence is considerably marred unless that rendering is retained. There are other analogous expressions in Scripture, setting forth, under various metaphors, God's protection of them that love Him. But I know not that there is any so noble and striking as this. For instance, we read of His hiding His children "in the secret of His tabernacle," or tent; as an Arab chief might do a fugitive who had eaten of his salt, secreting him in the recesses of his tent whilst the pursuers scoured the desert in vain for their prey. Again, we read of His hiding them "beneath the shadow of His wing"; where the Divine love is softened into the likeness of the maternal instinct which leads a hen to gather her chickens beneath the shelter of her own warm and outspread feathers. But the metaphor of my text is more vivid and beautiful still. "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face." The light that

streams from that countenance is the hiding-place for a poor man. These other metaphors may refer, perhaps, the one to the temple, and the other to the outstretched wings of the cherubim that shadowed the Mercy-seat. And, if so, this metaphor carries us still more near to the central blaze of the Shekinah, the glory that hovered above the Mercy-seat, and glowed in the dark sanctuary, unseen but once a year by one trembling high priest, who had to bear with him blood of sacrifice, lest the sight should slay. The Psalmist says that into that fierce light a man may go, and stand in it, bathed, concealed, secure. "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face."

I.—Now, then, let us notice, first, this hiding-place.

The "face" of God is so strongly figurative an expression that its metaphorical character cannot but be obvious to the most cursory reader. The very frankness, and, we may say, the grossness of the image, saves it from misconception, and, as with other similar expressions in the Old Testament, at once suggests its meaning. We read, for example, of the "arm," the "hand," the "finger" of God, and everybody feels that that means His power. We read of the "eye" of God, and everybody knows that that means His omniscience. We read of the "ear" of God, and we all understand that that holds forth the blessed thought that He hears and answers the cry of such as be sorrowful. And, in like manner, the "face" of God is the apprehensible part of the Divine nature which turns to men, and by which He makes Himself known. It is roughly equivalent to the other Old and New Testament expression, the "name of the Lord," the

manifested and revealed side of the Divine nature. And that is the hiding-place into which men may go.

We have the other expression also in Scripture, "the light of Thy countenance," and that helps us to apprehend the Psalmist's meaning. "The light of Thy face" is "secret." What a paradox! Can light conceal? Look at the daily heavens—filled with blazing stars, all invisible till the night falls. The effulgence of the face is such that they who stand in in it are lost and hid, like the lark in the blue sky. "A glorious privacy of light is Thine." There is a wonderful metaphor in the New Testament of a woman "clothed with the sun," and caught up into it from her enemies, to be safe there. And that is just an expansion of the Psalmist's grand paradox, "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face." Light conceals, when the light is so bright as to dazzle. They who are surrounded by God are lost in the glory, and safe in that seclusion, "the secret of Thy face."

A thought may be suggested, although it is somewhat of a digression from the main purpose of my text, but it springs naturally out of this paradox, and may just deserve a word. Revelation is real, but Revelation has its limits. That which is revealed is "the face of God." But we read, "no man can see My face." After all Revelation He remains hidden. After all pouring forth of His beams He remains "the God that dwelleth in the thick darkness," and the light which is inaccessible is also a darkness that can be felt. Apprehension is possible; comprehension is impossible. What we know of God is valid and true, but we never shall know all the depths that lie in that

which we do know of Him. His face is "the secret"; and though men may malign Him when they say, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel," and He answers them, "I have not spoken in secret" in a "dark place of the earth," it still remains true that Revelation has its mysteries born of the greatness of its effulgence, and that all which we know of God is "dark with excess of light."

But that is aside from our main purpose. Let me rather remind you of how the thought of the secret of God's face being the secure hiding-place of them that love Him points to this truth—that that brightness of light has a repellent power, which keeps far away from all intermingling with it everything that is evil. The old Greek mythologies tell us that the radiant arrows of Apollo, shot forth from his far-reaching bow, wounded to death the monsters of the slime and unclean creatures that crawled and revelled in darkness. And the myth has a great truth in it. The light of God's face slays evil, of whatsoever kind it is; and just as the unlovely, loathsome creatures, that live in the dark and find themselves at ease there, writhe and wriggle in torment, and die when their shelter is taken away and they are exposed to the sunshine beating on their soft bodies, so the light of God's face turned upon evil things smites them into nothingness. Thus "the secret of His countenance" is the shelter of all that is good.

Nor need I remind you how, in another aspect of the phrase, the "light of His face," is the expression for His favour and loving regard, and how true it is that in that favour and loving regard is the impregnable fortress into which, entering, any man is safe. I

said that the expression the "face of the Lord" roughly corresponded to the other one, "the name of the Lord," inasmuch as both meant the revealed aspect of the Divine nature. You may remember how we read, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower into which the righteous runneth and is safe." The "light" of the face of the Lord is His favour and loving regard falling upon men. And who can be harmed with that lambent light—like the sunshine upon water, or upon a glittering shield—playing around Him?

Only let us remember that for us "the face of God" is Jesus Christ. He is the "arm" of the Lord; He is the "name" of the Lord; He is the "face." All that we know of God we know through and in Him; all that we see of God we see by the shining upon us of Him, who is "the eradiation of His glory and the express image of His person." So the open secret of the "face" of God is Jesus, the hiding-place of our souls.

II.—Secondly, notice God's hidden ones.

My text carries us back, by that word "them," to the previous verse, where we have a double description of those who are thus hidden in the inaccessible light of His countenance. They are "such as fear Thee," and "such as trust in Thee." Now, that latter expression is congruous with the metaphor of my text, in so far as the words on which we are now engaged speak about a "hiding-place," and the word which is translated "trust" literally means "to flee to a refuge." So they that flee to God for refuge are those whom God hides in the "secret of His face." Let us think of that for a moment.

I said, in the beginning of these remarks, that there was here an allusion, possibly, to the Temple. All temples in ancient times were asylums. Whosoever could flee to grasp the horns of the altar, or to sit, veiled and suppliant, before the image of the god, was secure from his foes, who could not pass within the limits of the temple grounds, in which strife and murder were not permissible. We too often flee to other gods and other temples for our refuges. Ay! and when we get there, we find that the deity whom we have invoked is only a marble image that sits deaf, dumb, motionless, whilst we cling to its unconscious skirts. As one of the saddest of our modern cynics once said, looking up at that lovely impersonation of Greek beauty, the Venus de Milo, "Ah! she is fair; but she has no arms." So we may say of all false refuges to which men betake themselves. The goddess is powerless to help, however beautiful the presentment of her may have seemed to our eyes. The evils from which we have fled to these false deities and shelterless sanctuaries will pursue us across the boundary; and, as Elijah did with the priests of Baal upon Carmel, will slay us at the very foot of the altar to which we have clung, and vexed with our vain prayers. There is only one shrine where there is a sanctuary, and that is the shrine above which shines the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; into the brightness of which poor men may pass and therein may hide themselves. God hides us in the secret of the light and splendour of His face, and His hiding is effectual.

I said, too, that there was an allusion, as there is in all the psalms that deal with men as God's guests, to

the ancient customs of hospitality, by which a man who had once entered the tent of the chief, and partaken of food there, was safe, not only from his pursuers, but from his host himself, even though that host should be the kinsman-avenger. The red-handed murderer, who has eaten the salt of the man whose duty it otherwise would have been to slay him where he stood, is secure from his vengeance. And thus they who cast themselves upon God have nothing to fear. No other hand can pluck them from the sanctuary of His tent. He himself, having admitted them to share His hospitality, cannot and will not lift a hand against them. We are safe *from* God only when we are safe *in* God.

But remember the condition on which this security comes. "Thou shalt hide *them* in the secret of Thy face." Whom? Those that "flee for refuge to Thee." The act of simple faith is set forth there, by which a poor man, with all his imperfections on his head, may yet venture to put his foot across the boundary line that separates the outer darkness from the blaze of light that comes from God's face. "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" That question does not mean, as it is often taken to mean—What mortal can endure the punishments of a future life? but, Who can venture to be God's guests? and it is equivalent to the other interrogation, "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place?" The answer is, If you go to Him for refuge, knowing your danger, feeling your impurity, *you* may walk amidst all that light softened into lambent beauty, as those Hebrew children did in

the furnace of fire, being at ease there, and feeling it well with themselves, and having nothing consumed about them except the bonds that bound them.

Remember that Jesus Christ is the hiding-place, and that to flee to Him for refuge is the condition of security. All they who thus, from the snares of life, from its miseries, disappointments, and burdens; from the agitations of their own hearts, from the ebullition of their own passions; from the stings of their own conscience, or from other of the ills that flesh is heir to, make their hiding-place—by the simple act of faith of Jesus Christ—in the light of God's face are thereby safe for evermore.

But the initial act of fleeing to the refuge must be continued by abiding in the refuge. It is of no use to take shelter in the light unless we abide in the light. It is of no use to go to the Temple for sanctuary unless we continue in it for sacrifice and worship. We must "walk in the light as God is in the light." That is to say, the condition of being hid in God is, first of all, to take refuge in Jesus Christ, and then to abide in Him by continual communion. "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Unless we have a hidden life, deep beneath, and high above, and far beyond the life of sense, we have no right to think that the shelter of the Face will be security for us. The very essence of Christianity is the habitual communion of heart, mind, and will with God in Christ. Do you live in the light, or have you only gone there to escape what you are afraid of? Do you live in the light by the continual direction of thought and heart to Him, cultivating the habit of daily and hourly communion

with Him amidst the distractions of necessary duty, care, and changing circumstances.

But not only by communion, but also by conduct, must we keep in the light. The fugitive found outside the city of refuge was fair game for the avenger, and if He strayed beyond its bounds there was a sword in his back before he knew where he was. Every Christian by each sin, whether it be acted or only thought, casts himself out of the light into the darkness that rings it round, and out there he is a victim to the beasts of prey that hunt in darkness. An eclipse of the sun is not caused by any change in the sun, but by an opaque body, the offspring and satellite of the earth, coming between the earth and sun. And so, when Christian men lose the light of God's face, it is not because there is any variableness or shadow of turning in Him, but because between Him and them has come the blackness of their own sin—their own offspring. You are not safe if you are outside the light of the countenance. These are the conditions of security.

III.—Lastly, note what the hidden ones find in the light.

This burst of confidence in my text comes from the Psalmist immediately after plaintively pouring out his soul under the pressure of afflictions. His experience may teach us the interpretation of his glad assurance.

God will keep all real evil from us if we keep near Him; but He will not keep the externals that men call evil from us. I do not know whether there is such a thing as filtering any poisons or malaria from the air by means of light, but I am sure that the light of God filters our atmosphere for us. Though it may

leave the external forms of evil, it takes all the poison out of them and turns them into harmless ministers for our good. The arrows that are launched at us may be tipped with venom when they leave the bow, but if they pass through the radiant envelope of Divine protection that surrounds us—and they must have passed through that if they reach us—it cleanses all the venom from their points, though it leaves the sharpness there. The evil is not an evil if it has got our length; and its having touched us shows that He who lets it pass into the light, where His children safely dwell, knows that it cannot harm them.

But, again, we shall find, if we live in continual communion with the revealed face of God, that we are elevated high above all the strife of tongues and the noise of earth. We shall "outsoar the shadow of the night," and be lifted to an elevation from which all the clamours of earth will sound faint and poor, like the noises of the city to the dwellers on a mountain peak. Nor do we find only security there, for the word in the second clause of my text, "Thou shalt *keep* them *secretly*," is the same as is employed in the previous verse, in reference to the treasures which God *lays up* for them that fear Him. The poor men who trust in God, and the wealth which He has to lavish upon them, are both hid; and they are hid in the same place. The "goodness wrought before the sons of men" has not emptied the reservoir. After all expenditure the massy ingots of gold in God's store-house are undiminished. The mercy still to come is greater than that already received. "To-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant." This river broadens as we mount towards its source.

Brethren, the face of God must be either our dearest joy or our greatest dread. There comes a time when you and I must front it, and look into His eyes. It is for us to settle whether at that day we shall call upon the rocks and the hills to hide us from it, or whether we shall say with rapture, "Thou hast made us most blessed with Thy countenance." Which is it to be? It must be one or other. When He says, "Seek ye My face," may our hearts answer, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," that when we see it hereafter shining as the sun in his strength, its light may not be darkness to our impure and horrorstruck eyes!

XXI.

Full of Joy and of the Holy Ghost.

"THE eunuch went on his way rejoicing."—ACTS viii. 39.

"The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost."—ACTS xiii. 52.

HERE is a striking resemblance between the condition of the eunuch deprived of his teacher and of these raw disciples, in Pisidian Antioch, bereft of theirs. Both were very recent converts; both had the scantiest knowledge; both were left utterly alone. One might have forgiven the Ethiopian statesman if, as he contemplated his plunge into the darkness of his own country, where there was not a single Christian soul but himself, he had looked with some lingering regrets after his vanished teacher. But no sentiment of that sort fills his mind. "He went on his way rejoicing." The explanation which is supplied in reference to the Christians of Antioch, who stretched out no hands to retain Paul and Barnabas, and scarcely seemed to miss them, but "were filled with joy," may avail for the eunuch's experience too. They were full of the Spirit of God, and that enabled them to do without teachers, and more than made up for all losses.

Now this phrase, "full of the Holy Ghost," is not an uncommon one in the Acts of the Apostles; and the writer is fond of connecting with it other blessings and graces, of which it is declared to be the cause. So, for instance, we read that the deacons, who were to be chosen, were to be "men full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom"; and of Stephen we read that "he was full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." In like manner, the explanation of my text traces the joy of these solitary Christian souls to their abiding and complete possession of that Divine Spirit.

This state of being "filled with the Holy Ghost" is not regarded by the writer of the Acts of the Apostles as necessarily carrying with it the power of working miracle, or any other supernatural endowment, nor is it confined to the aristocracy of the Church, but it belongs to all. And if any Christian man is not thus completely possessed by the Divine Spirit, the Source of new life, and the very Soul of his soul, the fault lies wholly at his own door.

The two texts that I have put together, regarded in the light of the circumstances of the persons to whom they refer, seem to me to suggest to us two or three very large and blessed thoughts of what is available and possible for, and therefore the duty of, every Christian—the being "filled with the Spirit of God." So filled, we shall have an all-sufficient Teacher for all our ignorance; a Companion for all our solitude; a fountain of joy in all our sorrow. And the stories before us may help to illustrate these three things.

I.—First, then, note here the all-sufficient Teacher for our ignorance.

Think, for instance, of that Ethiopian statesman. An hour or two before, he had said, "How can I understand except some man guide me?" And now he is going away into the darkness, without a single external help of any kind, knowing only the little that he had gathered from Philip, in the course of a short conversation in the chariot. He had not a line of the New Testament. There were no Gospels in his day. He had nothing but a scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the way of outward help, but he went away with a glad heart, quite sure that he would be taught all he needed to know.

And these other people at Antioch, just dragged out of the filth and darkness of heathenism, with no teaching beyond the rudimentary instruction of the two apostles for a few days—they, too, were left by their teachers without a fear, and felt themselves alone without a tremor, because the teachers "commended them to God, and to the word of His grace," and the taught felt that they had a Divine instructor dwelling in their hearts.

The same thing has been experienced over and over again in the history of the Church. How often we have heard of some poor man that came to a Christian teacher in a heathen land, and picked up the one thought that God had sent His Son to love him and die for him; and carried that away in his heart into some solitary corner, and there, all alone and untaught of men, found that this one truth blossomed out into all manner of Divine wisdom according to his need!

There was once a great mission from one of our English denominations in the Island of Madagascar. It was smitten by persecution. Long years passed

during which not a soul went there from any Christian land. When at last communication was restored, what was found? A flourishing church. Who had taught it? God's Spirit.

Ah, brethren, we trust far too little to the educating and enlightening power of God's grace in the hearts of men who have no other teacher. And if Christian people more really believed the promise of their Master, which said, "He will guide you into all truth," they would be more likely to realize the promise, and be all taught of God. I would that I could rouse you Christian people to the real belief in that saying of Scripture, "Ye have an unction of the Holy One, and ye need not that any man teach you."

Only remember, the instrument of that Divine Teacher is the Word of God. And if we, as Christians, neglect our Bibles, we shall not get the teaching of the Spirit of God. And remember, too, that that teaching is granted to us on plainly defined conditions. There must be a desire for it. Oh, what an enormous and tragical number are there of so-called Christians who have no conception that there is anything more for them to learn than the initial truth, the acceptance of which saved their souls—viz., that Jesus Christ died on the cross for them. It is quite true that in one sense there is no more to learn. It is also true that it will take eternity for us to learn all that is in that one word. A clown in the fields sees as many stars as an astronomer, but it takes a lifetime of patient gazing and of hard study in order to arrive at some notion of the laws that move the shining orbs, and of their mighty magnitudes and distances. And so with the simple truth, which a half idiot and an almost babe

may take to heart, and find life in—viz., the sacrifice of the Son of God for the world's sins—there lie depths that will task the largest faculties, and will reward and bless the most protracted and patient search. If you do not desire a deeper, fuller, more vital, and more comprehensive knowledge of the treasures of wisdom that are laid up in that "simple gospel," you cannot expect that you will be taught what you do not want to know; or that the Spirit of God will force instruction upon an unwilling heart. You must desire it, and you must use the instrument. Read your Bibles, ponder your Bibles, become masters of them.

And there must be patient waiting and solitary meditation. They tell us that it is possible to overdo the manuring of a farm, and to put so much nourishment and stimulus upon the land as to spoil it. There are a great many Christians who have got so much of men's thinking, so many books, so many treatises, so many sermons, carted and shovelled on to their souls, that the productivity of their souls is ruined. And in this day of so many voices speaking of religion, precious as some of them may be, and helpful as the ministration of the Word is, from a brother's lips, if rightly used, there is sore need that Christian men should be pointed away from all human teachers, from a Philip and a Paul and a Barnabas, from an evangelist and an apostle, and should be relegated to the one great Teacher whose voice speaketh in secret, and makes us wise unto salvation. Depend upon it, the eunuch was in as good a place for profiting by the teaching of the Spirit of God in lonely Abyssinia, and amidst the secularities of the court of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, as if he

had been sitting in the middle of the church at Jerusalem and listening to the teaching of the apostles. Let us take the lesson, and whosesoever scholars we may be, let us enrol ourselves in the school of the Master, and learn from that Spirit who will guide us into all truth.

II.—Now, note, secondly, the Companion in all our solitude.

Think of the loneliness of this man on the Gaza road, or of that handful of sheep in the midst of wolves in Antioch. And yet they were not alone. "Full of the Holy Ghost," they were conscious of a Divine presence. And so it may be, dear brethren, with us all. We are all condemned to live alone, however many may be the troops of friends round us. Every human soul, after all love and companionship, lives isolated. There is only One who can pass the awful boundary of personality which hedges off every man from every other. Love comes to the gate, and sends its sweet influences within, but still there is a film of distance between. There is only one Being that can pass within and mingle—in no metaphor, but in fullest reality—His being with my being, so that, in a very deep and blessed sense, we may be one. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"—two, in so far that there remains the sweet consciousness of giving and receiving; one, in so far that a mightier smelting power than that of earthly love is in operation to fuse the believing spirit with the Spirit of the living God.

Let no man say that that is mystical and wants verifying. Trust Christ and you will have it verified. It is not mysticism, it is the very heart of the Gospel.

We need never be alone if we have this Companion. Besides the natural, necessary solitude in which every human soul lives there are some of us, no doubt, on whom God, by His providence, has laid the burden of a very lonely life. God's purpose in making us solitary is to join Himself to us. He sent His prophet away into the dreadful desert of Sinai, that there, amidst its wild peaks and blasted dreary loneliness, he might see the great sight and hear the Divine voice. "I will bring her into the desert, and will speak to her heart." Oh, brother, if your hand has been untwined from a dear hand—if you look along the long stretch of life, and see no prospect of other companion—learn the lesson and the privilege of your solitude, and take God into it to keep you company. Left alone, nestle close to Him.

Beside the natural and the providential solitudes there is yet another. We must make a solitude for ourselves, if we would have God speaking to us and keeping us company. Solitude is the mother-country of the strong. To be much alone is the condition of sanity and nobleness of life. I know, of course, that domestic arrangements and imperative duties make it all but impossible for many of us to realize to any large extent the outward solitude, which is so calming and bracing and every way desirable. But, for all that, brother, and making all needful allowance, and gladly remembering that God will come to people in a crowd, if His providence has fixed them there, let us not forget that there must be a Mount of Olives in the life of every follower of Jesus Christ. We cannot afford to neglect what He had to attend

to, who the more He was busy in the Temple, the more went out to the mountain-top, and continued there all night in prayer to God. His commandment to us is still, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile." Conferences and meetings and congresses and crowds have their function, no doubt—perhaps we could do with fewer of them—but, at all events, no man's religion will be deep and strong unless he has learned to go into the secret place of the Most High, and shut his doors about him, and there receive the fulness of that Spirit.

III.—Lastly, notice the Joy in all sorrow.

"Full of joy and of the Holy Ghost," says the latter of these two texts. That collocation is familiar to the student of the New Testament. You will remember the Apostle's great enumeration of the fruits of the Spirit: "Love, joy, peace." And in another place, still more relevant to our present purpose, he speaks to the members of one of his churches, and tells them that they had "received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost." So, then, whoever has this Divine Guest dwelling in his heart, may possess, and will possess, a joy as complete as is Its possession of him.

I need not remind you how that Divine Spirit who enters into our souls by faith brings to us the consciousness of forgiveness and of sonship, nor how It fits the needs of every part of our nature, and brings all our being into harmony with itself, with circumstances, and with God; and how, therefore, the man who thus is truly "good," is "satisfied from himself," because himself is not himself only, but himself with the Holy Spirit dwelling in him; how

such a man needs not to go to the brackish ponds of earthly and outward satisfaction, but has a never-failing fountain within, springing up, with joyous inherent energy, up, and up, and up into life everlasting.

But I may remind you that not only does this Divine Spirit in us make provision for joy, but that, with such an indwelling Guest, there is the possibility of the co-existence of joy and sorrow. It was no paradox that the Apostle gave forth when he said, "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Even in the midst of the snow and cold and darkness of Arctic regions, the explorers build houses for themselves of the very blocks of ice, and within are warmth and light and comfort and vitality, while around is a dreary waste. There may be two currents in the great ocean; a cold one may set from the pole and threaten to chill and freeze all life out, but from the equator there will be a warm one which will more than counterbalance the inrush of the cold. And so it is possible for us, even when things about us are dark and gloomy, and flesh and natural sensibilities all proclaim to us the necessity of sadness —it is possible for us to be aware of a central blessedness, not boisterous, but so grave and calm that the world cannot discriminate between it and sadness, which yet its possessors know to be blessedness unmingled. Left alone, we may have a companion; in our ignorance we may be enlightened; and in the murkiest night of our sorrow we may have, burning cheerily within our hearts, a light unquenchable.

But remember that this joy from the Spirit is a commandment. I am sure that Christians do not sufficiently lay to heart that gladness is their duty,

and that sorrow unrelieved by it is cowardice and sin. We have no business to be thus sorrowful. There are no unmingled, and there are no irrevocable, causes for sorrow in the lives of any men who can say, "God is my Father; Christ is my Brother; the Spirit of God dwells in my heart." "Therefore, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice."

But remember the conditions. If you and I have that Divine Spirit within us we shall be enlightened, however ignorant; companioned, however solitary; joyful, however ringed about with sorrow. If we have not, the converse will be true: we shall grope in the darkness, however we conceit ourselves to know; we shall have a central sorrow, however we may have a delusive, superficial joy, "the end of which is heaviness," and we shall be alone, however we may seem to be companied by troops of friends. If we have faith in Christ we shall have the Spirit of Christ. If, like the people in one of my texts, we can say truly that we are disciples, "we shall be filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." He that is full of faith is full of God's Spirit.

XXII.

Pilate washing his hands.

"PILATE . . . took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it."—MATT. xxvii. 24.

PILATE'S motives in surrendering Jesus to death were as plain as they were paltry. He had no fear that any danger to Rome would result from Christ. The characteristic Roman contempt for ideas and ideals which speaks in his cynical question, "What is truth?" led him to look with a kind of almost amused pity at a man whom he thought of as a mere harmless enthusiast. He knew his subjects too well to suppose that they would have been so eager to surrender an effective leader of revolt, and he detected the personal "malice" which lay behind their newborn and suspicious loyalty. Then personal motives came in. He feared being accused at Rome. And so, for his own security, he stifled his conscience, resisted his wife's warnings, and gave up Jesus to their will. The death of one Jew was a trifle if he could keep his ticklish charge in good-humour. That was his sin. He knew that Christ's death would be murder. He knew that he was art and part in it. And yet he took the basin and washed his hands

before the howling mob. In vain! "All the perfumes of Araby could not whiten *that* hand," and his impotent effort to cast off responsibility only witnessed to his consciousness of it.

So this saying of his and his deed may suggest to us some wholesome thoughts.

I.—The first point to notice is the vain plea for wrongdoing.

Pilate excused himself to himself on the ground that policy and self-defence forced him to his act. He could say "I am innocent" because he said, "I am obliged to connive at this crime." Though in his case the plea is for a gigantic sin, and in our cases it may be for a comparatively small one, the same sort of thing is being said by us continually. Nothing is more common than for a man to say to himself, "Well, I am very sorry, I could not help myself. I was forced into it by the exigencies of my position. Circumstances required it. This, that, and the other desirable thing, as it seems to me, could not be got without a little straining of what is right, and a little yielding to the force of men or things round about me. And so it is really the cruel circumstances in which I was placed, far more than myself, that ought to be condemned as responsible for this deed of mine."

Well, now, dear friends, it is a very plain and threadbare and commonplace piece of morality, but it needs to be reiterated over and over again—there is *nothing* necessary for a man, which he can only get or keep by tampering with conscience. There are two things needful for us: God and righteousness; and there is no third. With these we have what we need; without them, we have not. And nothing is worth the

buying for which we have to part with absolute adherence to the law of right.

You remember the quaint story of the man in the dock who said to the judge, "It is necessary that should live," and was answered, "I do not see the necessity." No, there is not a necessity for living, if we have to sin in order to live. It is better to die. The one thing needful is "to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." And so Necessity, which is sometimes said to be "the tyrant's plea," is the coward's plea as well; and the weakling's plea.

And in another way, the pleading of compulsion from without, as an excuse for evil, is evidently vain; because no man and no thing can force us to do wrong. We know, in each specific case, that, however strong the temptation may have been, we could have resisted it if we would, and that therefore the yielding to it was our act and ours only.

Therefore let no man say, "I had to yield to popular clamour. I was overborne by the rush of general opinion. Everybody else thought so, and, therefore, I had to say so." That is the crying sin that besets public men and aspirants after public positions, in a democratic country like ours. And this last fortnight* has let us see, in many places, examples of it, of men paltering with convictions, and stretching to the breaking point their conceptions of right, because they thought that they would gain favour thereby. I am not speaking about this man or that man, about this party or that party, but I am taking a modern instance illustrating an ancient saw. Pilate's sin has been committed in England these last few days over

* This sermon was preached after a General Election.

and over again. "The people would have it so; and I said it, and I did it."

But it is not only statesmen and politicians and officials and other men who live by the breath of popular favour and appreciation that are in danger from such a shabby excuse as this. It applies to us all. Therefore, let us fix it firmly in our hearts that if once we admit considerations of expediency, or of the pressure of circumstances, or of personal advantage, to modify our conceptions of duty, we have embarked on a voyage on which there is nothing before us but shipwreck.

The compasses on board iron vessels get unreliable, and need to be rectified. If a man once allows the iron mass of popular opinion, or of apparently compelling circumstances, to touch his conscience, then it is deflected from the pole of right. One thing only is to be our guide, and that is the plain, simple dictate of imperative duty, which alone is essential for the blessedness of our lives.

If we want to keep firm to that stern adherence to the loftiest conception of conduct, and to obey duty, and not inclinations or apparent necessity, there is only one effectual way of doing it, and that is to live in close and constant touch with Jesus Christ, who pleased not Himself; and to whom nothing was necessary, except that He should do the will of the Father that sent Him, and finish His work.

II.—Then, secondly, notice here the possibility of entire self-deception.

This man had managed to persuade himself, on a very rotten plea, as I have tried to suggest, that he was entirely free from guilt in his act. And the fact

that the man who did the most awful of crimes—though perhaps he was not the most guilty—could do it with the profession, to some extent sincere, of innocence, may teach us very solemn lessons.

You can persuade yourself that almost any wrong thing is right, if only you desire to do so. Conscience is no separate faculty dwelling in a man, irrespective of the moral condition of the man, and acting as if it were apart altogether from the rest of him. What we call conscience is only the whole man judging the moral character of his doings. And so its judgments vary according to his whole character. It is no inflexible standard, like the golden measuring-rod of the angel, but a leaden rule which may be bent, curtailed, and tampered with in many different ways. You can lash the helm to one side of the ship, and keep it fast there, if you like. Will can silence conscience, and say, "Hold your tongue!" and it obeys to a very large extent. Inclination can silence conscience. We all

> "Compound for sins we are inclined to
> By damning those we have no mind to."

The rush of passion can silence conscience. A whisper is not audible amidst the roar of Niagara. True, it speaks afterwards and says to us, "Now you *shall* listen!" But then that is too late. The very stress of daily life tends to weaken the power of pronouncing moral judgment on the things that we are doing. Scientists tell us that aneroid barometers will correspond with mercurial ones a great deal more closely in the observatory than they do on the field or mountain side. So, conscience will coincide with

the absolute law of right a great deal more accurately when there is no stress of temptation or of daily work to perturb it. And thus it comes about that it is possible for us to be breathing a poisonous atmosphere, and to have our lungs so habituated to the carbonic acid that we do not know how foul it is, till we get out into purer air and take a deep breath of *it*. We all have sins altogether unsuspected by ourselves.

Therefore the acquittal of conscience is no sign of the acquittal of God. "I have nothing against myself," said Paul, in reference to his official tasks; "yet am I not hereby justified, but He that judgeth me is the Lord." "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." There are plenty of us that do just as Pilate—who condemned himself in saying, "I am innocent of the blood."

Therefore, dear friends, one prime element of all noble living is to have special care to cultivate sensitiveness of conscience beyond its present degree. And how is that to be done? Mainly and chiefly, I believe, by living, as I have already said in reference to another matter, in touch with Jesus Christ. Mainly by having the habit of referring all that we are to the pattern of what we ought to be, which is set forth in Him. Conscience is not our guide. It is the recorder and repeater of guidance from the Christ, and only in the measure in which it is educated, corrected, enlightened, and made more sensitive by the habit of always thinking of Jesus Christ as our Example, to conform to whom is righteousness, to diverge from whom is sin, shall we come to the condition in which we can at all trust our own conceptions of what

is right or wrong. First and foremost, if we would have a conscience quickened and void of offence, let us live in the light of Christ's face, and take Him as the embodiment of all things lovely and of good report.

Then, again, let us cultivate, far more than the average Christian man of this day does, the habit of careful scrutiny of ourselves. "Know thyself," was the proud saying of the ancient teacher. The only way to know what I am is to notice what I do. And the most of us give very little diligence to a careful examination, apart from passion or inclination, of the moral character of our habitual daily lives. White ants will eat the whole substance out of a bit of furniture, and leave it apparently perfectly sound and solid. I wonder how many of us have had microscopic millions of gnawing evils, working beneath cover, in our characters. As long as the form of godliness is left standing we know not, many of us, that all the inner heart and substance of it is gone. Look after yourselves; know yourselves; practise the forgotten habit of rigid self-examination, and you will be the less likely to be the fools of a perverted or drugged conscience.

And make sure that when it does speak you listen to its slightest hints. "He that despiseth little things," says one of the Apocryphal books, "shall fall by little and little." The habit of thinking of any of our deeds that they are too small to make it worth while to bring the big artillery to bear upon them, is the ruin of a great many men. There is nothing that so effectually silences the remonstrances of the inward voice as the habit of neglecting it. If you persistently

pick the buds off a plant, and do not let it either flower or fruit, you will kill it; and if you nip the shoots of conscience by neglecting its warnings, then the plant will, if it does not die, at least, as it were, retreat into its root, and lie there dormant, till—till it is transplanted by Death, and a new climate draws it out into activity.

And so, dear brethren, keep close to Christ; cultivate the habit of self-scrutiny; obey the faintest voice of conscience; and say to God, "Search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way, and lead me in the way everlasting."

III.—Again, notice how here we get an illustration of the impossibility of wriggling out of responsibility.

It is very interesting to observe how the parties concerned—the conspirators, if I may so say—in this great tragedy try to shuffle the blame off their own shoulders and to place it on others. Did you ever remark that Pilate almost verbally re-echoes the dialogue between Judas and the priests, which had just taken place? The traitor said: "I have betrayed the innocent blood." Pilate said: "The blood of this innocent person." The rulers said: "What is that to us? See thou to it." Pilate gives them back their own word, though he did not know it, and says to them: "See ye to it." And then they defiantly yelled out: "His blood be on us and on our children." So all round, both in the attempt to get rid of, and in the awful willingness to accept, the responsibility of the deed, there is the consciousness expressed that there is a wrong somewhere, and that, whosoever was the doer of it, the consequences of it are fastened upon him for ever.

So we may suggest that well-worn but most wholesome and needful thought, that if there is anything a man's own, of which he cannot get rid, it is the burden of responsibility for his acts, and the inheritance of their consequences. Oh, there is nothing more solemn than that awful loneliness in which each soul of man lives, after all companionship, love and sympathy! We stretch out our hands and grasp loved hands, and yet there is a universe between the two that are nearest and most truly one. Islands in a great sea are we all. They tell us that no body is so closely compact but that there are films of air between the atoms of which it is composed, and hence all are more or less elastic. It is a parable of humanity. Each man dwells alone, and the intensest instance of his solitude is his unshared and untransferable and inevitable proprietorship in all that he has done. "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." Memory, conscience, position, habits, character—these, if there were no God at all, make it certain that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall shall he also reap." And thus the responsibility of the deed lies only with the doer of it. You cannot shuffle it off upon your associates. A party of brigands fire at travellers. No man knows whose shot it was that killed, but every man that pulled a trigger bears the guilt of the murder And so, though we may sin in company, we have to pay for it alone. You cannot establish your innocence by saying, like Adam, "The woman gave it to me and I did eat," or, like Aaron, "The people are set on evil: they said unto me, Make us gods which shall go

before us," or, like Pilate, "I am innocent, see ye to it." "God will send the bill to you."

IV.—And that brings me, lastly, to note the contrast between present and future estimates of our acts.

Pilate probably went back to Cæsarea after the feast, thinking that he had got well out of what threatened to be an awkward business; and in all likelihood he never thought any more, either about that strange Prisoner, or about that stormy session in the Hall of Judgment. That is a great deal more likely to be true than the legends which tell us of his being a prey to perpetual remorse. We have not to measure his guilt. It depends upon his knowledge, and his knowledge was very slight. Perhaps the worse thing that could be said about him was that he did not follow out dim impressions as to the elevation and mystery about his Prisoner; and that he connived at what in his heart he knew to be a murder. He was far less guilty than those rulers; he was far less guilty than a great many of us are. But, for all that, one cannot help thinking of the shock of surprise which struck him when he passed beyond life, and ceased to be a governor and a judge, and stood at the bar of the Man whom he had condemned.

Ah! brethren, the same reversal of present and future estimates will come about with many of us. "That fierce light which" flashes from the "throne" will show the seaminess of many a life which looks fairly well by the candle-light of this present. And I pray you to ask yourselves the question, Do you think that you are ready for the revealing sunshine of "the day that shall declare it"?

Pilate said, "See ye to it." The mob yelled, "His blood be on us and on our children." Jesus Christ prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Guilt is not irremovable; responsibility can be cancelled. The great blessing, the great mystery, of the Gospel is this, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And if we will put the burden of our sins upon His shoulders, He will bear it, and bear it away, and lay the light burden of His love upon us.

Only, dear brethren, if we are to share in the power and blessedness of that wondrous Sacrifice for sin, we must take heed that Pilate's words are not upon our lips. They who say "I am innocent" shut themselves out from the worth of the Sacrifice that was made only for the guilty. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

XXIII.

Two Retrospects of One Life.

"And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been."—Gen. xlvii. 9.

"The God which fed me all my life long unto this day; the angel which redeemed me from all evil."—Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

HESE are two strangely different estimates of the same life, to be taken by the same man. In the latter, Jacob categorically contradicts everything that he had said in the former. "Few and evil," he said before Pharaoh. "All my life long," "the angel which redeemed me from all evil," he said on his deathbed.

If he meant what he said when he spoke to Pharaoh, and characterized his life thus, he was wrong. He was possibly in a melancholy mood. Very naturally, the unfamiliar splendours of a court dazzled and bewildered the old man, accustomed to a quiet shepherd life down at Hebron. He had not come to see Pharaoh, he only cared to meet Joseph and, as was quite natural, his new and uncongenial surroundings depressed him. Possibly the words are only a piece of the etiquette of an Eastern court where it is the correct thing for the subject to depreciate himself in all respects, as far inferior to the

prince. And there may be little more than conventional humility in the words of my first text. But I am rather disposed to think that they express the true feeling of the moment, in a mood that passed and was followed by a more wholesome one.

I put the two sayings side by side for the sake of gathering up one or two plain lessons from them.

I.—We have here two possible views of life.

Now the key to the difference between these two statements and moods of feeling seems to me to be a very plain one. In the former of them there is nothing about God. It is all Jacob. In the latter we notice that there is a great deal more about God than about Jacob, and that determines the whole tone of the retrospect. In the first text Jacob speaks of "the days of the years of *my* pilgrimage," "the days of the years of *my* life," and so on, without a syllable about anything except the purely earthly view of life. Of course, when you shut out God, the past is all dark enough, grey and dismal, like the landscape on some cloudy day, where the woods stand black, and the rivers creep melancholy through colourless fields, and the sky is grey and formless above. Let the sun come out, and the river flashes into a golden mirror, and the woods are alive with twinkling lights and shadows, and the sky stretches a blue pavilion above them, and all the birds sing. Let God into your life, and its whole complexion and characteristics change. The man who sits whining and complaining when he has shut out the thought of a Divine presence, finds that everything alters when he brings that in.

And, then, look at the two particulars on which the

patriarch dwells. "I am only 130 years old," he says, a mere infant compared with Abraham and Isaac! How did he know he was not going to live to be as old as either of them? And "if his days were evil," as he said, was it not a good thing that they were few? But, instead of that, he finds reasons for complaint in the brevity of the life which, if it were as evil as he made it out to be, must often have seemed wearisomely long, and dragged very slowly. Now, both things are true—life is short, life is long. Time is elastic—you can stretch it or you can contract it. It is short compared with the duration of God; it is short, as one of the Psalms put it pathetically, as compared with this Nature round us. "The earth abideth for ever"; we are strangers upon it, and there is no abiding for us. It is short as compared with the capacities and powers of the creatures that possess it; but, oh! if we think of our days as a series of gifts of God, if we look upon them, as Jacob looked upon them when he was sane, as being one continued shepherding by God, they stretch out into blessed length. Life is long enough it it manifests that God takes care of us, and if we learn that He does. Life is long enough if it serves to build up a God-pleasing character.

It is beautiful to see how the thought of God enters into the dying man's remembrances in the shape which was natural to him, regard being had to his own daily avocations. For the word translated "fed" means much more than supplied with nourishment. It is the word for doing the office of shepherd, and we must not forget, if we want to understand its beauty, that Jacob's sons said: "Thy servants are shepherds; both we and also our fathers." So this man, in the

solitude of his pastoral life, and whilst living amongst his woolly people, who depended upon his guidance and care, had learnt many a lesson as to how graciously, and tenderly, and constantly fed, and led, and protected, and fostered by God were the creatures of His hand.

It was he, I suppose, who first gave to religious thought that metaphor which has survived temple, and sacrifice, and priesthood, and will survive even earth itself; for "I am the Good Shepherd" is true to-day as when first spoken by Jesus, and "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them," and be their Shepherd, when the flock is carried to the upper pastures, and the springs that never fail. The life which has brought us that thought of a Shepherd-God has been long enough; and the days which have been so expanded as to contain a continuous series of His benefits and protections need never be remembered as "few," whatever is the arithmetic that is applied to them.

The other contradiction is equally eloquent and significant. "Few and evil" have my days been, said Jacob, when he was not thinking about God; but, when he remembered the Angel of the Presence, that mysterious person with whom he had wrestled at Peniel, and whose finger had lamed the thigh while his lips proclaimed a blessing, his view changed, and instead of talking about "evil days," he says, "the angel that redeemed me from all evil." Yes, his life had been evil, whether by that we mean sorrowful or sinful, and the sorrows and the sins had been closely connected. A sorely tried man he had been. Far away back in the past had been his banishment from

home; his disappointment and hard service with the churlish Laban; the misbehaviour of his sons; the death of Rachel—that wound which was never staunched—and then the twenty years' mourning for Rachel's son, the heir of his inheritance. These were his evils; his sins were as many; for every one of the sorrows, except perhaps that chiefest of them all, had its root in some piece of duplicity, dishonesty, or failure. But after all he lived to see Joseph. The evils had stormed over him, but he survived still. And so, at the end, he says: "The angel . . . redeemed me from evil, though it smote me. Sorrow became chastisement, and I was purged of my sin by my calamities. The sorrows are past, like some raging inundation that comes up for a night over the land and then subsides; but the blessing of fertility which it brought in its tawny waves abides with me yet. Joseph is by my side. I had not thought to see thy face, and God hath showed me the face of thy seed." That sorrow is over. Rachel's grave is still by the wayside, and that sharpest of pangs has wrought with others to purify character. Jacob has been tried by sorrows; he has been cleansed from sins. "The angel delivered me from all evil." So, dear friends, sorrow is not evil, if it helps to strip us from the evil that we love; and the ills that we bear are good if they alienate our affections from the ills that we do.

II.—Secondly, note the wisdom and the duty of taking the completer and brighter view.

These first words of Jacob are very often quoted as if they were the pattern of the kind of thing people ought to say: "Few and evil have been the

days of the years of my pilgrimage"; that is a text from which many sermons have been preached with approbation of the pious resignation expressed in it. But it does not seem to me that that is the tone of Jacob. If the man believed what he said, then he was very ungrateful and short-sighted, though there were excuses to be made for him under the circumstances. If the days had been evil, he had made them so.

But the point which I wish to make now is, that it is largely a matter for our own selection which of the two views of our lives we take. We may make our choice whether we shall fix our attention on the brighter or on the darker constituents of our past.

Suppose a wall papered with paper of two colours—one black, say, and the other gold. You can work your eye and adjust the focus of vision, so that you may see either a black background or a gold one. In the one case the prevailing tone is gloomy, relieved by an occasional touch of brightness; and in the other it is brightness, heightened by a background of darkness. And so we can do with life, fixing attention on its sorrows, and hugging ourselves in the contemplation of these, with a kind of morbid satisfaction, or bravely and thankfully and submissively and wisely resolving that we will rather seek to learn what God means by darkness, and not forgetting to look at the unenigmatical blessings and plain, obvious mercies that make up so much of our lives. We have to govern memory, as well as other faculties, by Christian principle. We have to apply the plain teaching of Christian truth to our sentimental, and often unwholesome, contemplations of the past. There is enough in all our lives to make material for plenty of whining

and complaining, if we choose to take hold of them by that handle. And there is enough in all our lives to make us ashamed of one murmuring word, if we are devout and wise and believing enough to lay hold of them by that. Remember you can make your view of your life either a bright one or a dark one, and there will be facts for both; but the facts that feed melancholy are partial and superficial, and the facts that exhort, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say Rejoice," are deep and fundamental.

III.—So, lastly, note how blessed a thing it is when the last look is the happiest.

When you are amongst the mountains or when you are very near them they look barren enough, rough, stony, steep. When you get away from them, and look at them across the plain, they lie blue in the distance; and the violet shadows and golden lights upon them and the white peaks above make a dream of beauty. Whilst we are in the midst of the struggle, we are often tempted to think that things go hardly with us and that the road is very rough. But if we keep near our dear Lord, and hold by His hand, and try to shape our lives in accordance with His will —whatever be their outward circumstances and texture—then we may be very sure of this, that when the end comes, and we are far enough away from some of the sorrows to see what they lead to and blossom into, then we shall be able to say, It was all very good, and to thank Him for all the way by which the Lord our God has led us.

In the same conversation in which the patriarch, rising to the height of a prophet and organ of Divine revelation, gives this his dying testimony of the faith-

fulness of God, and declares that he has been delivered from all evil, he recurs to the central sorrow of his life, and speaks, though in calm words, of that day when he buried Rachel by "Ephrath, which is Bethel." But the pain had passed and the good was present to him. And so, leaving life, he left it according to his own word, "satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord." So we in our turns may, at the last, hope that what we know not now will largely be explained; and may seek to anticipate our dying verdict by a living confidence, in the midst of our toils and our sorrows, that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

XXIV.

The Two Guests.

"His anger endureth but a moment, in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Ps. xxx. 5.

A WORD or two of exposition is necessary in order to bring out the force of this verse. There is an obvious antithesis in the first part of it, between "His anger" and "His favour." Probably there is a similar antithesis between "a moment" and "life." For although the word rendered "life" does not unusually mean a life*time*, it *may* have that signification, and the evident intention of contrast seems to require it here. So, then, the meaning of the first part of my text is, "the anger lasts for a moment; the favour lasts for a lifetime." The perpetuity of the one and the brevity of the other are the Psalmist's thought.

Then, if we pass to the second part of the text, you will observe that there is there also a double antithesis. "Weeping" is set over against "joy"; the "night" against the "morning." And the first of these two contrasts is the more striking if we observe that the word "joy" means, literally, "a joyful shout,"

so that the voice which was lifted in weeping is conceived of as now being heard in exultant praise. Then, still further, the expression "may endure" literally means "come to lodge." So that Weeping and Joy are personified. Two guests come; one, dark-robed and approaching at the fitting season for such, "the night." The other bright, coming with all things fresh and sunny, in the dewy morn. The guest of the night is Weeping; the guest that takes its place in the morning is Gladness.

The two clauses, then, of my text suggest substantially the same thought, and that is the persistence of joy and the transitoriness of sorrow. The one speaks of the succession of emotions in the man; the other, of the successive aspects of the Divine dealings which occasion these. The whole is a leaf out of the Psalmist's own experience. The psalm commemorates his deliverance from some affliction, probably a sickness. That is long gone past; and the tears that it caused have long since dried up. But this shout of joy of his has lasted all these centuries, and is like to be immortal. Well for us if we can read our life's story with the same cheery confidence as he did his, and have learned like him to discern what is the temporary and what the permanent element in our experience!

I.—Note, first, the proportion of joy and sorrow in an ordinary life.

The Psalmist expresses, as I have said, the same idea in both clauses. In the former the "anger" is contemplated not so much as an element in the Divine mind, as in its manifestations in the Divine dealings. I shall have a word or two, presently, to

say about the Scriptural conception of the "anger" of God, and its relation to the "favour" of God; but for the present I take the two clauses as being substantially equivalent.

Now is it true—is it *not* true—that, if a man rightly regards the proportionate duration of these two diverse elements in his life, he must come to the conclusion that the one is continuous and the other is but transitory? A thunderstorm is very short when measured against the long summer day in which it crashes; and very few days have them. It must be a bad climate where half the days are rainy. If we were to take the chart and prick out upon it the line of our voyage, we should find that the spaces in which the weather was tempestuous were brief and few indeed as compared with those in which it was sunny and calm.

But, then, man looks before and after, and has the terrible gift that by anticipation and by memory he can prolong the sadness. The proportion of solid matter needed to colour the Irwell is very little in comparison with the whole of the stream. But the current carries it, and a trace of dye-stuff will stain miles of the turbid stream. Memory and anticipation beat the metal thin, and make it cover an enormous space. And the misery is that, somehow, we have better memories for sad hours than for joyful ones, and it is easier to get accustomed to "blessings," as we call them, and to lose the poignancy of their sweetness because they become familiar, than it is to apply the same process to our sorrows, and thus to take the edge off them. The rose's prickles are felt in the flesh longer than its fragrance lives in the nostrils, or its

hue in the eye. Men have long memories for their pains as compared with their remembrance of their sorrows.

So it comes to be a piece of very homely, well-worn, and yet always needful, practical counsel to try not to magnify and prolong grief, nor to minimize and abbreviate gladness. We can make our lives, to our own thinking, very much what we will. We cannot directly regulate our emotions, but we *can* regulate them, because it is in our own power to determine which aspect of our life we shall by preference contemplate.

We can choose, to a large extent, what we shall conceive our lives to be; and so we can very largely modify their real character.

> "There's nothing either good or bad
> But thinking makes it so."

They who will can surround themselves with persistent gladness, and they who will can gather about them the thick folds of an ever-brooding and enveloping sorrow. Courage, cheerfulness, thankfulness, buoyancy, resolution, are all closely connected with a sane estimate of the relative proportions of the bright and the dark in a human life.

II.—And now consider, secondly, the inclusion of the "moment" in the "life."

I do not know that the Psalmist thought of that when he gave utterance to my text, but whether he did it or not, it is true that the "moment" spent in "anger" is a part of the "life" that is spent in the "favour." Just as within the circle of a life lies each of its moments, the same principle

of inclusion may be applied to the other contrast presented here. For as the "moment" is a part of the "life," the "anger" is a part of the love. The "favour" holds the 'anger" within itself, for the true Scriptural idea of that terrible expression and terrible fact, the "wrath of God," is that it is the necessary aversion of a perfectly pure and holy love from that which does not correspond to itself. So, though sometimes the two may be set against each other, yet at bottom, and in reality, they are one, and the "anger" is but a mode in which the "favour" manifests itself. God's love is plastic, and, if thrown back upon itself, grieved and wounded and rejected, becomes the "anger" which ignorant men sometimes seem to think it contradicts There is no more antagonism between these two ideas when they are applied to God, than when they are applied to you parents in your relations to a disobedient child. You know, and your child knows, that if there were no love there would be little "anger." Neither of you suppose that an irate parent is an unloving parent. "If ye, being evil, know how," in dealing with your children, to blend wrath and love, "how much more shall your Father which is in heaven" be one and the same Father when His love manifests itself in chastisement and when it expands itself in blessings.

Thus we come to the truth that breathes uniformity and simplicity through all the various methods of the Divine hand, that howsoever He changes and reverses His dealings with us, their motive is one and the same. You may get two diametrically opposite motions out of the same machine. The same power will send one wheel

revolving from right to left, and another from left to right, but they are co-operant to grind out at the far end the one product. It is the same revolution of the earth that brings blessed lengthening days and growing summer, and that cuts short the sun's course and brings declining days and increasing cold. It is the same motion which hurls a comet close to the burning sun, and sends it wandering away out into the fields of astronomical space, beyond the ken of telescope, and almost beyond the reach of thought. And so one uniform Divine purpose—the favour which uses the anger—fills the life, and there are no interruptions, howsoever brief, to the steady, continuous flow of His outpoured blessings. All is love and favour. Anger is masked love, and sorrow has the same source and mission as joy. It takes all sorts of weathers to make a year, and all tend to the same issue of ripened harvests and full barns. Oh! brethren, if we understood that God means something better for us than happiness, even likeness to Himself, we should understand better how our deepest sorrows and bitterest tears, and the wounds that penetrate deepest into our bleeding hearts, all come from the same motive, and are directed to the same end as their most joyful contraries. One thing the Lord desires, that we may be partakers of His holiness And so we may venture to give an even deeper meaning to the Psalmist's words than he intended, and recognize that the "moment" is an integral part of the "life," and the "anger" a mode of the manifestation of the "favour."

III.—Lastly, notice the conversion of the sorrow into joy.

I have already explained the picturesque image of

the last part of my text, which demands a little further consideration. There are two figures presented before us, the dark-robed and the bright-garmented. The one is the guest of the night, the other is the guest of the morning. The verb which occurs in the first clause of the second half of my text is not repeated in the second, and so the words may be taken in two ways. They may either express how Joy, the morning guest, comes, and turns out the evening visitant, or they may suggest how we took Sorrow in when the night fell, to sit by the fireside, but when morning dawned—who is this, sitting in her place, smiling as we look at her? It is Sorrow transfigured, and her name is changed into Joy. Either the substitution or the transformation may be supposed to be in the Psalmist's mind.

Both are true. No human heart, however wounded, continues always to bleed. Some gracious vegetation creeps over the most utter ruin. The roughest edges are smoothed by time. Vitality asserts itself; other interests have a right to be entertained and are entertained. The recuperative powers come into play, and pangs depart and the poignancy is softened. The cutting edge gets blunt on even poisoned spears by the gracious influences of time. The nightly guest, Sorrow, slips away, and, ere we know, another sits in her place. Some of us try to fight against that merciful process, and seem to think that it is a merit to continue, by half-artificial means, the first sharpness of pain, and that it is treason to some dear remembrances to let life have its way, and to-day have its rights. That is to set ourselves against the dealings

of God, and to refuse to forgive Him for what His love has done for us.

But the other thought seems to me to be even more beautiful, and probably to be what was in the Psalmist's mind—viz., the transformation of the evil, sorrow itself, into the radiant form of joy. A prince comes to a poor man's hovel, is hospitably received in the darkness, and, being received and welcomed, in the morning slips off the rags and appears as he is. Sorrow is Joy disguised.

If it is accepted, if the will submits, if the heart lets itself be untwined, that its tendrils may be coiled closer round the heart of God, then the transformation is sure to come, and joy will dawn on those who have done rightly—that is, submissively and thankfully—by their sorrows. It will not be a joy like what the world calls joy—loud-voiced, boisterous, ringing with idiot laughter; but it will be pure, and deep, and sacred, and permanent. A white lily is better than a flaunting peony, and the joy into which sorrow accepted turns is pure, and refining, and good.

So, brethren, remember that the richest vintages are grown on the rough slopes of the volcano, and lovely flowers blow at the glacier's edge; and all our troubles, great and little, may be converted into gladnesses if we accept them as God meant them. Only they must be so accepted if they are to be thus changed. But there may be some hearts recoiling from much that I have said now, and thinking to themselves, "Ah! there are two kinds of sorrows. There are those that *can* be cured, and there are those that *cannot*. What have you to say to me who have to bleed from an immedicable wound till the end of

my life?" Well, I have to say this—look beyond earth's dim dawns to that morning when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise to them that love His name, with healing in His wings. If we have to carry loads on aching backs till the end, be sure that when the night which is far spent is over, and the day which is at hand hath broken, every raindrop will be turned into a flashing rainbow when it is smitten by the level light, and every sorrow rightly borne be represented by a special and particular joy.

Only, brother, if our life is to be spent in His favour, it must be spent in His fear. And if our cares and troubles and sorrows and losses are to be transfigured hereafter, then we must keep very near Jesus Christ, who has promised to us that His joy will remain with us, and that our sorrows shall be turned into joys. If we trust to Him, the voices that have been raised in weeping will be heard in gladness, and earth's minor will be transposed by the great Master of the music into the key of Heaven's jubilant praise. If only "we look not at the things seen, but at the things which are not seen," then "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"; and the weight will be no burden, but will bear up those who are privileged to bear it.

XXV.

The Waves of Time.

"THE times that went over him."—1 CHRON. xxix. 30.

HIS is a fragment from the chronicler's close of his life of King David. He is referring in it to other written authorities in which there are fuller particulars concerning his hero; and he says, "the Acts of David the King, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer . . . with all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over all Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries."

Now I have ventured to isolate these words, because they seem to me to suggest some very solemn and stimulating thoughts about the true nature of life. They refer, originally, to the strange vicissitudes and extremes of fortune and condition which characterized, so dramatically and remarkably, the life of King David. Shepherd boy, soldier, court favourite, outlaw, freebooter and all but brigand; rebel, king, fugitive, saint, sinner, psalmist, penitent—he lived a life full of strongly marked alterations, and "the times that went over him" were singularly separate and different from each other. There are very few

of us who have such chequered lives as his. But the principle which dictated the selection by the chronicler of this somewhat strange phrase is true about the life of every man.

I.—Note, first, "the times" which make up each life.

Now, by the phrase here the writer does not merely mean the succession of moments, but he wishes to emphasize the view that these are epochs, sections of "time," each with its definite characteristics and its special opportunities, unlike the rest that lie on either side of it. The great broad field of time is portioned out, like the strips of peasant allotments, which show a little bit here with one kind of crop upon it, bordered by another tiny morsel of ground, bearing another kind of crop. So the whole is patchy, and yet all harmonizes in effect if we look at it from high enough up. Thus each life is made up of a series, not merely of successive moments, but of well-marked epochs, each of which has its own character, its own responsibilities, its own opportunities, in each of which there is some special work to be done, some grace to be cultivated, some lesson to be learned, some sacrifice to be made; and if it is let slip it never comes back any more. "It might have been once, and we missed it, lost it for ever." The times pass over us, and every single portion has its own errand to us. Unless we are wide awake we let it slip, and are the poorer to all eternity for not having had in our heads the eyes of the wise man which "discern both time and judgment." It is the same thought which is suggested by the well-known words of the cynical book of Ecclesiastes—"To every thing there is a season and a

time"—an opportunity, a definite period—"for every purpose that is under the sun." It is the same thought which is suggested by Paul's words, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men. In due season we shall reap if we faint not." There is a time for weeping and a time for laughing, a time for building up and a time for casting down. It is the same thought of life, and its successive epochs of opportunity never returning, which finds expression in the threadbare lines about "a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune," and, neglected, condemns the rest of a career to be hemmed in among creeks and shallows.

Through all the variety of human occupations, each moment comes to us with its own special mission, and yet, alas! to far too many of us the alternations do not suggest the question, What is it that I am hereby called upon to be or to do? What is the lesson that present circumstances are meant to teach, and the grace that my present condition is meant to force me to cultivate or exhibit? There is one point, as it were, upon the road where we may catch a view far away into the distance, and, if we are not on the look-out when we come there, we shall never get that glimpse at any other point along the path. The old alchemists used to believe that there was what they called the "moment of projection," when, into the heaving molten mass in their crucible, if they dropped the magic powder, the whole would turn into gold; an instant later, and there would be explosion and death; an instant earlier, and there would be no effect.

And so God's moments come to us; every one of them—if we had eyes to see and hands to grasp—a

crisis, affording opportunity for something for which all eternity will not afford a second opportunity, if the moment be let pass. "The times went over him." And your life and mine is parcelled out into seasons which have their special vocation for and message to us.

How solemn that makes our life! How it destroys the monotony that we sometimes complain of! How it heightens the low things and magnifies the apparently small ones! And how it calls upon us for a sharpened attention, that we miss not any of the blessings and gifts which God is meaning to bestow upon us, through the ministry of each moment! How it calls upon us for not only sharpened attention, but for a desire to know the meaning of each of the hours and of every one of His providences! And how it bids us, as the only condition of understanding the times, so as to know what we ought to do, keep our hearts in close union with Him, and ourselves ever standing, as becomes servants, girded and ready for work; and with the question on our lips and in our hearts, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do; and what wouldst Thou have me to do *now?*" The lesson of the day has to be learned in the day, and at the moment when it is put in practice.

II.—Another thought suggested by this text is, the power that moves the times.

As far as my text represents—and it is not intended to go to the bottom of everything—these times flow on over a man as a river might. But is there any power that moves the stream? Unthinking and sense-bound men—and we are all such, in the measure in which we are unspiritual—are contented

simply to accept the mechanical flow of the stream of time. We are all tempted not to look behind the moving screen to see the force that turns the wheel on which the painted scene is stretched. But, oh. how dreary a thing it is if all that we have to say about life is "The times pass over us," like the blind rush of a stream, or the movement of the sea around our coasts, eating away here and depositing its spoils there, sometimes taking and sometimes giving, but all the work of mere eyeless and purposeless chance or of natural causes.

Oh! brethren, there is nothing more dismal nor paralyzing than the contemplation of the flow of the times over our heads, unless we see in their flow something far more than itself.

It is very beautiful to notice that this same phrase, or at least the essential part of it, is employed by David himself in one of his Psalms, with a very significant addition. He says, "My times are *in Thy hand.*" So, then, the passage of our epochs over us is not merely the aimless flow of a stream, but the movement of a current which God directs. Therefore, if at any time it goes over our heads and seems to overwhelm us, we can look up through the transparent water, and say, "*Thy* waves and *Thy* billows have gone over me," and so I die not of suffocation beneath them. God orders the times, and therefore, though, as the bitter ingenuity of Ecclesiastes, on the look-out for proofs of the vanity of life, complained in a one-sided view, as an aggravation of man's lot that there is a time for everything, yet that aspect of change is not its deepest or truest. True it is that sometimes birth and sometimes death, sometimes joy and sometimes

sorrow, sometimes building up and sometimes casting down, follow each other with monotonous uniformity of variety, and seem to reduce life to a perpetual heaping up of what is as painfully to be cast down the next moment, like the pitiless sport of the wind amongst the sandhills of the desert. But the fertility is only apparent, and the changes are not meant to occasion man's "misery to be great upon him," as Ecclesiastes says they do. The diversity of the "times" comes from a unity of purpose; and all the various methods of the Divine providence exercised upon us have one unchanging intention. The meaning of all the "times" is that they should bring us nearer to God, and fill us more full of His power and grace. The web is one, however various may be the pattern wrought upon the tapestry. So the varying times do all tend to one great issue. Therefore let us seek to pursue, in all varying circumstances, the one purpose which God has in them all; which the Apostle states to be "even your sanctification," and let us understand how summer and winter, springtime and harvest, tempest and fair weather, do together make up the year, and ensure the springing of the seed and the fruitfulness of the stalk.

III.—Lastly, let me remind you, too, how eloquently the words of my text suggest the transiency of all the "times."

They "passed over him" as the wind through an archway, that whistles and cometh not again. The old, old thought, so threadbare and yet always so solemnizing and pathetic, which we know so well that we forget it, and are so sure of that it has little effect

on life, the old, old thought—"this too will pass away"—underlies the phrase of my text.

How blessed it is, brethren, to cherish that wholesome sense of the transiency of things here below only those who live under its habitual power can fairly estimate. It is thought to be melancholy. We are told that it spoils joys and kills interest, and I know not what beside. It spoils no joys that ought to be joys. It kills no interests that are not on other grounds unworthy to be cherished. Contrariwise, by a strange paradox, the more fully we are penetrated with the persistent conviction of the transiency of the things seen and temporal, the greater they become. For then only are they seen in their true magnitude and nobility, in their true solemnity and importance, as having a bearing on the things that are eternal. Time is "the ceaseless lackey of eternity," and the things that pass over us may become, like the waves of the sea, the means of bearing us to the unmoving shore. Oh, if only in the midst of joys and sorrows, of heavy tasks and corroding cares, of weary work and wounded spirits, we could feel that they are "but for a moment," all would be different, and joy would come, and strength would come, and patience would come, and every grace would come, in the train of the wholesome conviction that "here we have no continuing city."

Cherish the thought. It will spoil nothing the spoiling of which will be a loss. It will heighten everything the possession of which is a gain. It will teach us to trust in the darkness, and to believe in the light. And when the times are dreariest, and frost binds the ground, we shall say, "If winter comes,

can spring be far behind?" The times roll over us, like the seas that break upon some isolated rock, and when the tide has fallen, and the vain flood has subsided, the rock is there. If the world helps us to God, we need not sorrow though it passes, and the fashion thereof.

But do not let us forget that my very text in its connection may teach us another thought. The transitory "times that went over" Israel's king are recorded imperishably on the pages here. And so, though condensed into narrow space, the record of the fleeting moments lives for ever. And "the books shall be opened, and men shall be judged according to their works." We are writing an imperishable record by our fleeting deeds. Half a dozen pages carry all the story of that stormy life of David. It takes a thousand rose-trees to make a vial full of essence of roses. The record and issues of life will be condensed into small compass, but the essence of it is eternal. We shall find it again, and have to drink as we have brewed when we get yonder. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." There is a time to "sow," and that is the present life; "and there is a time to reap" the fruits of our sowing, and that is the time when times have ended, and eternity is here.

XXVI

The Church and Social Evils.

"It came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."—NEHEMIAH i. 4.

INETY years had passed since the returning exiles had arrived at Jerusalem. They had encountered many difficulties which had marred their progress and cooled their enthusiasm. The Temple, indeed, was rebuilt, but Jerusalem lay in ruins, and its walls remained as they had been left, by Nebuchadnezzar's siege, some century and a half before. A little party of pious pilgrims had gone from Persia to the city, and had come back to Shushan with a sad story of weakness and despondency, affliction and hostility. One of the travellers had a brother, a youth named Nehemiah, who was a cupbearer in the court of the Persian king. Living in a palace, and surrounded with luxury, his heart was with his brethren; and the ruins of Jerusalem were dearer to him than the pomp of Shushan.

My text tells how the young cupbearer was affected by the tidings, and how he wept and prayed before God. The accurate dates given in this book show that

this period of brooding contemplation of the miseries of his brethren lasted for four months. Then he took a great resolution, flung up brilliant prospects, identified himself with the afflicted colony, and asked for leave to go and share, and, if it might be, to redress, the sorrows which had made so deep a dint upon his heart.

Now I think that this vivid description, drawn by himself, of the emotions excited in Nehemiah by his countrymen's sorrows, which influenced his whole future, contains some very plain lessons for Christian people, the observance of which is every day becoming more imperative by reason of the drift of public opinion, and the new prominence which is being given to so-called "social questions." I want to gather up one or two of these lessons for you this morning.

I.—First, then, note the plain Christian duty of sympathetic contemplation of surrounding sorrows.

Nehemiah might have made a great many very good excuses for treating lightly the tidings that his brother had brought him. He might have said: "Jerusalem is a long way off. I have my own work to do; it is no part of my business to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. I am the king's cupbearer. They went with their eyes open, and experience has shown that the people who knew when they were well off, and stayed where they were, were a great deal wiser." These were not his excuses. He let the tidings fill his heart, and burn there.

Now, the first condition of sympathy is knowledge; and the second is attending to what we do know. Nehemiah had probably known, in a kind of vague

way, for many a day, how things were going in Palestine. Communications between it and Persia were not so difficult but that there would come plenty of Government despatches; and a man at head-quarters, who had the ear of the monarch, was not likely to be ignorant of what was going on in that part of his dominions. But there is all the difference between hearing vague general reports and sitting and hearing your own brother tell you what he had seen with his own eyes. So the impression which had existed before was all inoperative, until it was kindled by attention to the facts which all the time had been, in some degree, known.

Now, how many of us are there that know—and do not know—what is going on round about us in the slums and back courts of this city? How many of us are there that are habitually ignorant of what we actually *know*, because we never, as we say, "give heed" to it. "I did not think of that" is a very poor excuse about matters concerning which there is knowledge, whether there is thought or not. And so I want to press upon all you Christian people the plain duty of knowing what you do know, and of giving an ample place in your thoughts to the stark, staring facts around us.

Why! loads of people at present seem to think that the miseries, and hideous vices, and sodden immorality and utter heathenism, which are found down amongst the foundations of every civic community are as indispensable to progress as the noise of the wheels of a train is to its advancement, or as the bilge-water in a wooden ship is to keep its seams tight. So we prate about "civilization," which properly means

bringing men into the state of living in cities. If agglomerating people into these great communities, which make so awful a feature of modern life, be necessarily attended by such abominations as we live amongst, and never think about, then, better that there had never been civilization in such a sense at all. Every consideration of communion with and conformity to Jesus Christ, of loyalty to His words, of a true sense of brotherhood, and of lower things—such as self-interest—*every* consideration demands that Christian people shall take to their hearts, in a fashion that the churches have never done yet, "the condition of England question," and shall ask, "Lord! what wouldst Thou have me to do?"

I do not care to enter upon controversy raised by recent utterances, the motive of which may be worthy of admiration, though the expression cannot be acquitted of the charge of exaggeration, to the effect that the Christian churches as a whole have been careless of the condition of the people. It is not true in its absolute sense. I suppose that, taking the country over, the majority of the members of, at all events, the Nonconformist churches and congregations are in receipt of weekly wages or belong to the upper ranks of the working classes, and that the lever which has lifted them to these upper ranks has been God's Gospel. I suppose it will be admitted that the past indifference with which we are charged belonged to the whole community, and that the new sense of responsibility which has marked, and blessedly marked, recent years, is largely owing to political and other causes which have lately come into operation. I suppose it will not be denied that, to a very large

extent, any efforts which have been made in the past for the social, intellectual and moral, and religious elevation of the people have had their impulse, and to a large extent their support, both pecuniary and active, from Christian churches and individuals. All that is perfectly true and, I believe, undeniable. But it is also true that there remains an enormous, shameful, dead mass of inertness in our churches, and that, unless we can break up that, the omens are bad, bad for society, worse for the Church. If cholera is raging in Ancoats, Didsbury will not escape. If the hovels are infected, the mansions will have to pay their tribute to the disease. If we do not recognize the brotherhood of the suffering and the sinful, in any other fashion—then, as a great teacher told us a generation ago now, and nobody paid any attention to him, then they will rise up and show you that they are your brethren by killing some of you by infection caught from them. And so self-preservation conjoins with loftier motives to make this sympathetic observation of the surrounding sorrows the plainest of Christian duties.

II.—Secondly, such a realization of the dark facts is indispensable to all true work for alleviating them.

There is no way of helping men but by bearing what they bear. No man will ever lighten a sorrow of which he has not himself felt the pressure. Jesus Christ's Cross, to which we are ever appealing as the ground of our redemption and the anchor of our hope, is these, thank God! But it is more than these. It is the pattern for our lives, and it lays down the enduring conditions of helping the sinful and the sorrowful with stringent accuracy and completeness.

The "saviours of society" have still, in lower fashion, to be crucified. Jesus Christ would never have been the Lamb of God, that bore away the sins of the world, unless He Himself had "taken our infirmities and borne our sicknesses." No work of healing will be done, except by those whose hearts have bled with the feeling of the miseries which they have set themselves to cure.

Oh! we all want a far fuller realization of that sympathetic spirit of the pitying Christ, if we are ever to be of any use in the world, or to help the miseries of any of our brethren. Such a sorrowful and participating contemplation of men's sorrows springing from men's sins will give tenderness to our words, will give patience, will soften our whole bearing. Help that is flung to people, as you might fling a bone to a dog, hurts those whom it is meant to benefit, and patronizing help does little good, and lecturing help does little more. You must take blind beggars by the hand if you are going to make them see; and you must not be afraid to lay your white, clean fingers upon the feculent masses of corruption in the leper's glistening whiteness, if you are going to make him whole. Go down in order to lift, and remember that without sympathy there is no sufficient help, and without communion with Christ there is no sympathy.

III.—Thirdly, such realization of surrounding sorrows should drive to communion with God.

Nehemiah wept and mourned, and that was well. But between his weeping and mourning and his practical work there had to be still another link of connection. "He wept and mourned," and because he was sad he turned to God—"I fasted and prayed

certain days.". There he got at once comfort for his sorrows and sympathies, and deepening of his sympathies, and thence he drew inspiration that made him a hero and a martyr. So, all true service for the world must begin with close communion with God.

There was a book published some year or two ago which made a great noise in its little day, and called itself "The Service of Man," which service it proposed to substitute for the effete conception of worship as the service of God. The service of man is then best done when it is the service of God. I suppose nowadays it is "old-fashioned" and "narrow," which is the sin of sins at present, to say that I have very little faith in the persistence and wide operation of any philanthropic motives except the highest—namely, compassion caught from Jesus Christ. I do not believe that you will get men year in and year out to devote themselves in any considerable numbers to the service of man, unless you appeal to this highest of motives You may enlist a little corps—and God forbid that I should deny such a plain fact—of selecter spirits to do purely secular. alleviative work, with an entire ignoring of Christian motives, but you will never get the army of workers that is needed to grapple with the facts of our present condition, unless you touch the very deepest springs of conduct, and these are to be found in communion with God. Other philanthropy is like surface wells, that soon run dry. Get down to the love of God, and the love of men therefrom, and you have tapped an artesian well which will bubble up unfailingly.

And I have not much faith in remedies which ignore religion, and are vaunted as, without it,

sufficient for the disease. I do not want to say one word that might seem to depreciate what are good and valid and noble efforts in their several spheres. There is no need for antagonism—rather, Christian men are bound by every consideration to help to the utmost of their power, even in the incomplete attempts that are made to grapple with social problems. There is room enough for us all. But sure I am that until grapes and water-beds cure small-pox, and a spoonful of cold water puts out Vesuvius, you will not cure the evils of the body politic by any lesser means than the application of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We hear a great deal to-day about a "social gospel," and I am glad of the conception, and of the favour which it receives. Only let us remember that the Gospel is social *second*, and individual *first;* and that, if you get the love of God and obedience to Jesus Christ into a man's heart, it will be like putting gas into a balloon. It will go up, and the men will get out of the slums fast enough; and he will not be a slave to the vices of the world much longer, and you will have done more for him and for the wide circle that he may influence than by any other means. I do not want to depreciate any helpers, but I say it is the work of the Christian Church to carry to the world the only thing that will make men deeply and abidingly happy, because it will make them good.

IV.—And so, lastly, such sympathy should be the parent of a noble, self-sacrificing life. Look at the man in our story. He had the ball at his feet. He had the *entrée* of a court, and the ear of a king. Brilliant prospects were opening before him, but his

brethren's sufferings drew him, and, with a noble resolution of self-sacrifice, he shut himself out from them and went into the wilderness. He is one of the Scripture characters that have never had due honour—hero, a saint, a martyr, a reformer. He did, though in a smaller sphere, the very same thing that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews magnified with his splendid eloquence, in reference to the great Lawgiver, "and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," and to turn his back upon the dazzlements of a court, than to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," whilst his brethren were suffering.

Now, dear friends, the letter of the example may be put aside; the spirit of it must be observed. If Christians are to do the work that they can do, and that Christ has put them into this world that they may do, there must be self-sacrifice with it. There is no shirking that obligation, and there is no discharging our duty without it. You and I, in our several ways, are as much under the sway of that absolute law, that if a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it brings forth fruit, as ever were Jesus Christ or His apostles. I have nothing to say about the manner of the sacrifice. It is no part of my business to prescribe to you details of duty. It is my business to insist on the principles which must regulate these; and of these principles in application to Christian service there is none more stringent than, "I will not offer unto my God burnt-offering of that which doth cost me nothing."

I am sure that, under God, the great remedy for social evils lies mainly here, that the bulk of professing Christians shall recognize and discharge their

responsibilities. It is not ministers, city missionaries, Bible-women, or any other paid people that can do the work. It is to be by Christian men and by Christian women, and if I might use a very vulgar distinction, which has a meaning in the present connection, very specially by Christian ladies, taking their part in the work amongst the degraded and the outcasts, that our sorest difficulties and problems will be solved. If a church does not face these, well! all I can say is, it will go spark out; and the sooner the better. "If thou forbear to deliver them that are appointed to death, and say, Behold! I knew it not, shall not He that weigheth the hearts consider it, and shall He not render to every man according to his work?" And, on the other hand, there are no blessings more rich, select, sweet, and abiding than are to be found in sharing the sorrow of the Man of Sorrows, and carrying the message of His pity and His redemption to an outcast world. "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, the Lord shall satisfy thy soul; and thou shalt be as a watered garden, and as a spring of water whose waters fail not."

XXVII.

One Saying from Three Men.

"THE wicked hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved.'—PSALM x. 6.

"Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."—PSALM xvi. 8.

"And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved."—PSALM xxx. 6.

HOW differently the same things sound when said by different men! Here are three people giving utterance to almost the same sentiment of confidence. A wicked man says it, and it is insane presumption and defiance. A good man says it, having been lulled into false security by easy times, and it is a mistake that needs chastisement. A humble believing soul says it, and it is the expression of a certain and blessed truth. "The wicked saith in his heart, I shall not be moved." A good man, led astray by his prosperity, said, "I shall not be moved," and the last of the three puts a little clause in which makes all the difference, "*because He is at my right hand,* I shall never be moved." So, then, we have the mad arrogance of godless confidence, the mistake of a good man that needs correction, and the warranted confidence of a believing soul.

I.—The mad arrogance of godless confidence.

The "wicked" man, in the psalm from which our first text comes, said a good many wrong things "in his heart." The tacit assumptions on which a life is based, though they may never come to consciousness and still less to utterance, are the really important things. I daresay this "wicked man" was a good Jew with his lips, and said his prayers all properly, but in his heart he had two working beliefs. One is thus expressed: "As for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved." The other is put into words thus: "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten, He hideth His face, He will never see it."

That is to say, the only explanation of a godless life, unless the man is an idiot, is that there lie beneath it, as formative principles and unspoken assumptions, guiding and shaping it, one or both of these two thoughts: either "There is no God," or "He does not care what I do, and I am safe to go on for evermore in the present fashion." It might seem as if a man, with the facts of human life before him, could not, even in the insanest arrogance, say, "I shall not be moved for I shall never be in adversity." But we have an awful power—and the facts that we can exercise, and choose to exercise, are among the strange riddles of our enigmatical existence and characters—of ignoring unwelcome facts, and going cheerily on as though we had annihilated them, because we do not reflect upon them. So this man, in the midst of a world in which there is no stay, and whilst he saw all around him the most startling and tragical instances of sudden change and complete collapse, stands quietly

and says, "Ah! *I* shall never be moved"; "God doth not require it."

That absurdity is the basis of every life that is not a life of consecration and devotion—so far as it has a basis of conviction at all. The "wicked" man's true faith is this, absurd as it may sound when you drag it out into clear distinct utterance, whatever may be his professions. I wonder if there are any of us whose life can only be acquitted of being utterly unreasonable and ridiculous, by the assumption "I shall never be moved."

Have you a lease of your goods? Do you think you are tenants at will or owners? Which? Is there any reason why any of us should escape, as some of us live as if we believed we should escape, the certain fate of all others? If there is not, what about the sanity of a man whose whole life is built upon a blunder? He is convicted of the grossest folly, unless he is assured that either there is no God, or that He does not care one rush about what we do, and that consequently we are certain of a continuance in our present state.

Do you say in your heart, "I shall never be moved"? Then you must be strong enough to resist every tempest that beats against you. Is that so? "I shall never be moved." Then nothing that contributes to your well-being will ever slip from your grasp, but you will always be able to hold it tight. Is that so? "I shall never be moved." Then there is no grave waiting for you. Is that so? Unless these three assumptions are warranted, every godless man is making a hideous blunder, and his character is in the sentence pronounced by the loving lips of incarnate Truth on

the rich man who thought that he had "much goods laid up for many years," and had only to be merry—"Thou fool! Thou fool!"

If an engineer builds a bridge across a river without due calculation of the force of the winds that blow down the gorge, the bridge will be at the bottom of the stream some stormy night, and the train piled on the fragments of it in hideous ruin. And with equal certainty the end of the first utterer of this speech can be calculated, and is foretold in the psalm, "The Lord is King for ever and ever. . . . The godless are perished out of the land."

II.—We have in our second text the mistake of a good man who has been lulled into false confidence.

The Psalmist admits his error by the acknowledgment that he spoke "in my prosperity"; or, as the word might be rendered, "in my security." This suggests to us the mistake into which even good men, lulled by the quiet continuance of peaceful days, are certain to fall, unless continual watchfulness be exercised by them.

It is a very significant fact that the word which is translated in our Authorized Version "prosperity" is often rendered "security," meaning thereby, not safety but a belief that I am safe. A man who is prosperous, or at ease, is sure to drop into the notion that "to-morrow will be as this day, and much more abundant," unless he keeps up unslumbering watchfulness against the insidious illusion of permanence. If he yields to the temptation, in his foolish security forgetting how fragile are its foundations, and what a host of enemies surround him, threatening it, then there is nothing for it but that the merciful discipline, which

this Psalmist goes on to tell us he had to pass through by reason of his fall, shall be brought to bear upon him. The writer gives us a page of his own autobiography. "In my security I said, I shall never be moved." "Lord! by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide Thy face." What about the security then? What about "I shall never be moved" then? "I was troubled. I cried to Thee, O Lord!"—and then it was all right, his prayer was heard, and he was in "security"—that is, safety—far more really when he was "troubled" and sore beset than when he had been, as he fancied, sure of not being moved.

Long peace rusts the cannon, and is apt to make it unfit for war. Our lack of imagination and our present sense of comfort and well-being tend to make us fancy that we shall go on for ever in the quiet jog-trot of settled life without any very great calamities or changes. But there was once a village at the bottom of the crater of Vesuvius, and great trees, that had grown undisturbed there for a hundred years, and green pastures, and happy homes, and flocks. And then, one day a rumble, and a rush, and what became of the village? It went up in smoke clouds. The quiescence of a volcano is no sign of its extinction. And as surely as we live, so sure is it that there will came a "to-morrow" to us all which shall *not* "be as this day." No man has any right to calculate upon anything beyond the present moment, and there is no basis whatever, either for the philosophical assertion that the order of nature is fixed, and that therefore there are no miracles, or for the practical translation of the assertion into our daily lives, that we may

reasonably expect to go on as we are without changes or calamities. There is no reason, capable of being put into logical shape, for believing that, because the sun has risen ever since the beginning of things, it will rise to-morrow, for there will come a to-morrow when it will *not* rise. In like manner, the longest possession of our mercies is no reason for forgetting the precarious tenure on which we hold them all.

So, Christian men and women, let us try to keep vivid that consciousness which is so apt to get dull, that nothing continueth in one stay, and that we *shall* be moved, as far as the outward life and its circumstances are concerned. If we forget it, we shall need, and we shall get, the loving Fatherly discipline, which my second text tells us followed the false security of this good man. The sea is kept from putrefying by storms. Wine poured from vessel to vessel is purified thereby. It is an old truth and a wholesome one, to be always remembered, "because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

III.—Lastly, we have the same thing said by another man in another key. "Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." The prelude to the assertion makes all the difference. Here is the warranted confidence of a simple faith.

The man who clasps God's hand, and has Him standing by his side as his Ally, his Companion, his Guide, his Defence—that man does not need to fear change. For, all the thoughts which convict the arrogant or mistaken confidences of the other two speakers as being folly or a lapse from faith, prove the confidence of the trustful soul to be the very perfection of reason and common sense.

We may be confident of our power to resist anything that can come against us, if He be at our side. The man that stands with his back against an oak tree is held firm, not because of his own strength, but because of that of his support. There is a beautiful story of some heathen convert who said to a missionary's wife, who had felt faint and asked that she might lean for a space on her stronger arm, "If you love me, lean hard." That is what God says to us. "If you love Me, lean hard." And if we do, "because He is at our right hand, we shall not be moved." It is not insanity; it is not arrogance; it is simple faith, to look our enemies in the eyes, and to feel sure that they cannot touch us. "Trust in Jehovah; so shall ye be established." Rest in the Lord, and ye shall rest indeed.

In like manner the man who has God at his right hand may be sure of the unalterable continuance of all his proper good. Outward things may come or go, as it pleases Him, but that which makes the life of our life will never depart from us as long as He stands beside us. And whilst He is there, if only our hearts are knit to Him, we can say, "My heart and my flesh faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. I shall not be moved. Though all that can go goes, He abides; and in Him I have all riches." "Trust not in the uncertainty of outward good, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

The wicked man was defiantly arrogant, and the forgetful good man was criminally self-confident, when they each said, "I shall not be moved." We are only taking up the privileges that belong to us if, exercising

faith in Him, we venture to say, "Take what Thou wilt; leave me Thyself; I have enough." And the man who says, "Because God is at my right hand, I shall not be moved," has the right to anticipate an unbroken continuance of personal being, and an unchanged continuance of the very life of his life That which breaks off all other lives abruptly is no breach in the continuity, either of the consciousness or of the avocations, of a devout man. For beyond the flood, he does what he does on this side, only more perfectly and more continually. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." And it makes comparatively little difference to him whether his place be on this or on the other side of Jordan. We "shall not be moved," even when we change our station from earth to heaven. And the sublime fulfilment of the warranted confidence of the trustful soul is when the to-morrow of the skies is as the to-day of earth, only "much more abundant."

XXVIII.

Feasting on the Sacrifice.

"The meek shall eat and be satisfied."—Ps. xxii. 26.

HE flesh of the sacrifice of his peace-offering for thanksgiving shall be offered in the day of his oblation." Such was the law for Israel. And the custom of sacrificial feasts, which it embodies, was common to many lands. To such a custom my text alludes; for the Psalmist has just been speaking of "paying his vows" (that is, sacrifices which he had vowed in the time of his trouble), and to partake of these he invites the meek. In some way or other the singer of this Psalm anticipates that his experiences shall be the nourishment and gladness of a wide circle; and if we observe that in the context that circle is supposed to include the whole world, and that one of the results of partaking of this sacrificial feast is, "your heart shall live for ever," we may well say with the Ethiopian eunuch, "of whom speaketh the Psalmist thus?"

The early part of the Psalm answers the question. Jesus Christ laid His hand on this wonderful Psalm

of desolation, despair, and deliverance, when on the Cross He took its first words as expressing His emotion then: "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Whatever may be our views as to its authorship, and as to the connection between the Psalmist's utterances and his own personal experiences, none to whom that voice that rang through the darkness on Calvary is the voice of the Son of God, can hesitate as to who it is whose very griefs and sorrows are thus the spiritual food that gives life to the whole world.

From this, the true point of view, then, from which to look at the whole of this wonderful Psalm, I desire to deal with the words of my text now.

I.—We have first, then, the world's sacrificial feast.

The Jewish ritual, and that of many other nations, as I have remarked, provided for a festal meal following on, and consisting of the material of, the sacrifice. A generation which studies comparative mythology, and spares no pains to get at the meaning underlying the barbarous worship of the rudest nations, ought to be interested in the question of the ideas that underlay and were expressed by that elaborate Jewish ritual. In the present case the signification is plain enough. That which, in one aspect, is a peace-offering reconciling to God, in another aspect is the nourishment and the joy of the hearts that accept it. And so the work of Jesus Christ has two distinct phases of application, according as we think of it as being offered to God or appropriated by men. In the one aspect it is our peace; in the other it is our food and our life. If we glance for a moment at the marvellous picture of

suffering and desolation in the previous portion of this Psalm, which sounds the very depths of both, we shall understand more touchingly what it is on which Christian hearts are to feed. The desolation that spoke in "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" the consciousness of rejection and reproach, of mockery and contempt, which wailed, "All that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him; let Him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in Him"; the physical sufferings which are the very picture of crucifixion, so as that the whole reads more like history than prophecy, in "All my bones are out of joint; my strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws"; the actual passing into the darkness of the grave, which is expressed in "Thou hast brought me into the dust of death"; and even the minute correspondence, so inexplicable upon any hypothesis except that it is direct prophecy, which is found in "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture"—these be the viands, not without bitter herbs, that are laid on the table which Christ spreads for us. They are parts of the sacrifice that reconciles to God. Offered to Him they make our peace. They are parts and elements of the food of our spirits. Appropriated and partaken of by us they make our strength and our life.

Brethren, there is little food, there is little impulse, little strength for obedience, little gladness or peace of heart to be got from a Christ who is *not* a Sacrifice. If we would know how much He can be to us, as the nourishment of our best life, and as the source of our purest and permanent gladness, we must, first of all,

look upon Him as the Offering for the world's sin, and then as the very life and bread of our souls. The Christ that feeds the world is the Christ that died for the world.

Hence our Lord Himself, most eminently in one great and profound discourse, has set forth, not only that He is the Bread of God which came down from heaven, but that His flesh and His blood are so; and the separation between the two in the discourse, as in the memorial rite, indicates that the violent separation of death has taken place, and that thereby He becomes the life of humanity.

So my text, and the whole series of Old Testament representations in which the blessings of the Kingdom are set forth as a feast, and the parables of the New Testament in which a similar representation is contained, do all converge upon, and receive their deepest meaning from, that one central thought, that the peace-offering for the world is the food of the world. We see, hence, the connection between these great spiritual ideas and the chief act of Christian worship. The Lord's Supper simply says by act what my text says in words. I know no difference between the rite and the parable, except that the one is addressed to the eye and the other to the ear. The rite is an acted parable; the parable is a spoken rite. And when Jesus Christ, in the great discourse to which I have referred, dilates at length upon the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood as being the condition of spiritual life, He is not referring to the Lord's Supper, but the discourse and the rite both refer to the same spiritual truth. One is a symbol; the other is a saying; and symbol and saying mean just the

same thing. The saying does not refer to the symbol, but to that to which the symbol refers. It seems to me that one of the greatest dangers which now threaten Evangelical Christianity is the strange and almost inexplicable recrudescence of Sacramentarianism in this generation to which those Christian communities are contributing, however reluctantly and unconsciously, who say there is something more than commemorative symbols in the bread and wine of the Lord's table. If once you admit that, it seems, in my humble judgment, that you open the door to the whole flood of evils which the history of the Church declares have come with the Sacramentarian hypothesis. And we must take our stand, as I believe, upon the plain, intelligible thoughts—Baptism is a declaratory symbol, and nothing more; the Lord's Supper is a commemorative symbol, and nothing more; except that both are acts of obedience to the enjoining Lord. When we stand there we can face all priestly superstitions, and say, "Jesus I know; and Paul I know; but who are ye?" "The meek shall eat and be satisfied." And the food of the world is the suffering Messiah.

But what have we to say about the act expressed in the text? "The meek shall eat." I do not desire to dwell upon the thought of the process by which this food of the world becomes ours at any length. But there are two points which perhaps may be regarded as various aspects of one, on which I would like to say just a sentence or two. Of course, the translation of the "eating" of my text into spiritual reality is simply that we partake of Christ as the food of our spirits by the act of faith; and

that being so, personal appropriation, and making the world's food mine, by my own individual act, is the condition on which alone I get any good from it. It is possible to die of starvation at the door of a granary. It is possible to have a table spread with all that is needful, and yet to set one's teeth, and lock one's lips, and receive no strength and no gladness from the rich provision. "Eat" means, at any rate, incorporate with myself, take into my very own lips, masticate with my very own teeth, swallow down by my very own act, and so make part of my physical frame. And that is what we have to do with Jesus Christ, or He is nothing to us. "Eat"; claim your part in the universal blessing; see that it becomes yours by your own taking of it into the very depths of your heart. And then, and then only, will it become your food.

And how are we to do that if, day in and day out, and week in and week out, and year in and year out, with some of us, there be scarce a thought turned to Him; scarce a desire winging its way to him; scarce one moment of quiet contemplation of these great truths. We have to ruminate, we have to meditate; we have to make conscious and frequent efforts to bring before the mind, in the first place, and then before the heart and all the sensitive, emotional, and voluntary nature, the great truths on which our salvation rests. In so far as we do that we get good out of them; in so far as we fail to do it, we may call ourselves Christians and attend to religious observances, and be members of churches, and diligent in good works, and all the rest of it, but nothing passes from

Him to us, and we starve even whilst we call ourselves guests at His table.

Oh, the average Christian life of this day is a strange thing! very, very little of it has the depth that comes from quiet communion with Jesus Christ; and very little of it has the joyful consciousness of strength that comes from habitual reception into the heart of the grace that He gives. What is the good of all your profession unless it brings that to you? If a coroner's jury were to sit upon many of us—and we are dead enough to deserve it—the verdict would be, "Died of starvation." "The meek shall eat." But what about the professing Christians that feed their souls upon anything and everything rather than upon the Christ whom they say they trust and serve?

II.—And now let me say a word, in the second place, about the rich fruition of this feast?

"The meek shall be satisfied." Satisfied! Who in this world is? And if we are not, why are we not? Jesus Christ, in the facts of His death and resurrection—both of which are foretold in the Psalm—brings to us all that our circumstances, relationships, and inward condition can require.

Think of what that death, as the sacrifice for the world's sin, does. It sets all right in regard of our relation to God. It reveals to us a God of infinite love. It provides a motive, an impulse, and a pattern for all life. It abolishes death, and it gives ample scope for the loftiest and most exuberant hopes that a man can cherish. And surely these are enough to satisfy the seeking spirit.

But, further, think not of what Christ's work does for us, but of what we need to have done

for us. What do you and I want for satisfaction? It would take a long time to go over the catalogue; let me briefly run through some of the salient points of it. We need, for the intellect, which is the regal part of man, though it be not the highest, truth which is certain, comprehensive, and inexhaustible; the first, to provide anchorage; the second, to meet and regulate and unify all thought and life; and the last, to allow room for endless research and ceaseless progress. And in these facts that the eternal Son of the eternal Father took upon Himself human nature, lived, died, rose, and reigns at God's right hand, I believe there lie the seeds of all truth, except the purely physical and material, which men need. Everything is there; every truth about God, about man, about duty, about a future, about society; everything that the world needs is laid up in germ in that great Gospel of our salvation. If a man will take it for the foundation of his beliefs and the guide of his thinkings, he will find that his understanding is satisfied, because it grasps the personal Truth who liveth, and is with us for ever.

Our hearts crave, however imperfect their love may be, a perfect love; and a perfect love means one untinged by any dash of selfishness, incapable of any variation or eclipse, all-knowing, all-pitying, all-powerful. We have made experience of precious loves that die. We know of loves that change, that grow cold, that misconstrue, that may have tears to pity but no hands to help. We know of "loves" that are only a fine name for animal passions, and are twice cursed, cursing them that give and them that take. The happiest will admit, and the lonely will achingly feel,

how we all need for our satisfaction a love that cannot fail, that can help; that beareth all things, and that can do all things. We have it in Jesus Christ, and the Cross is the pledge thereof.

Conscience wants pacifying, cleansing, enlightening, directing, and it gets all these in the good news of One that has died for us, and that lives to be our Lord. The will needs authority which is not force. And where is there an authority so constraining in its sweetness and so sweet in its constraint as in those silken bonds which are stronger than iron fetters? Hope, imagination, and all other of our powers or weaknesses, our gifts or needs, are satisfied when they feed on Christ. If we feed upon anything else it turns to ashes that break our teeth and make our palates gritty, and have no nourishment in them. We shall be "for ever roaming with a hungry heart" unless we take our places at the feast on the one sacrifice for the world's peace.

III.—I can say but a word as to the Guests.

It is "the meek" who eat. The word translated "meek" has a wider and deeper meaning than that. "Meek" refers, in our common language, mainly to men's demeanour to one another; but the expression here includes more than that. It means both "afflicted" and "lowly"—the right use of affliction being to bow men. And they that bow themselves are those who are fit to come to Christ's feast. There is a very remarkable contrast between the words of my text and those that follow a verse or two afterwards. "The meek shall eat and be satisfied," says the text. And then close upon it comes, "All those that be fat upon

earth shall eat." That is to say, the lofty and proud have to come down to the level of the lowly and take their places at the table along with the poor and the starving, which, being turned into plain English, is just this—the main things that hinder a man from partaking of the fulness of Christ's satisfying grace is self-sufficiency, and the absence of a sense of need. They that "hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled"; and they that come, knowing themselves to be poor and needy, and humbly consenting to accept a gratuitous feast of charity—they, and only they, do get the rich provisions.

You are shut out because you shut yourselves out. They that do not know themselves to be hungry have no ears for the dinner-bell. They that feel the pangs of starvation and know that their own cupboards are empty are those who will turn to the table that is spread in the wilderness, and there find a feast of fat things.

And so, dear friends, when He calls, do not let us make excuses, but rather listen to that voice that says to us, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? . . . Incline your ear unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live."

XXIX.

The Dismissal of Judas.

'THEN said Jesus unto Judas, That thou doest, do quickly."—JOHN xiii. 27

HEN our Lord gave the morsel, dipped in the dish, to Judas, only John knew the significance of the act. But, if we supplement the narrative here with that given by Matthew, we shall find that, accompanying the gift of the sop, was a brief dialogue in which the betrayer, with unabashed front, hypocritically said, "Lord! is it I?" and heard the solemn, sad answer, "Thou sayest!" Two things, then, appealed to him at the moment: one, the conviction that he was discovered; the other, the wonderful assurance that he was still loved. For the gift of the morsel was a token of friendliness. He shut his heart against them both; and as he shut his heart against Christ he opened it to the devil. "So after the sop Satan entered into him." At that moment a soul committed suicide; and none of those that sat by, with the exception of Christ and the "disciple whom He loved," so much as dreamed of the tragedy going on before their eyes.

I know not that there are anywhere words more

weighty and wonderful than those of our text. And I wish to try now if I can at all make you feel as I feel their solemn signification and force. "That thou doest, do quickly."

I.—I hear in them, first, the voice of despairing love abandoning the conflict.

If I have rightly construed the meaning of the incident, this is its plain significance. And you will observe that the Revised Version, more accurately and closely rendering the words of our text, begins with a "*therefore*." "Therefore said Jesus unto him." Because the die was cast; because the will of Judas had conclusively welcomed Satan, and conclusively rejected Christ; therefore, knowing that remonstrance was vain, knowing that the deed was, in effect, done, Jesus Christ, that Incarnate Charity which "believeth all things, and hopeth all things," abandoned the man to himself and said, "There, then, if thou wilt thou must. I have done all I can; my last arrow is shot, and it has missed the target. That thou doest, do quickly."

There is a world of solemn meaning in that one little word "doest." It teaches us the old lesson, which sense is so apt to forget, that the true actor in man's deeds is the hidden man of the heart, and that, when it has acted, it matters comparatively little whether the mere tools and instruments of the hands or of the other organs have carried out the behest. A thing is done before it is done, when a man has resolved, with a fixed will, to do it. The betrayal was as good as in process, though no step beyond the introductory ones, which could easily have been cancelled, had yet been accomplished. Because there was

a fixed purpose which could not be altered by anything now, therefore Jesus Christ regards the act as completed. What we think in our hearts, *that* we are; and our fixed determinations, our inclinations of will, are far more truly our doings than the mere consequences of these, embodied in actuality. It is but a poor estimate of a man that judges by the test of what he has done. What he has wanted to do is the true man; what he has attempted to do. "It was well that it was in thine heart!" said God to the king who thought of building the Temple which he was never allowed to rear. "It is ill that it is in thine heart," says He by whom actions are weighed, to the sinner in purpose, though his clean hands lie idly in his lap. These hidden movements of desire and will that never come to the surface are our true selves. Look after them, and the deeds will take care of themselves. Serpents' eggs have serpents in them. And he that has determined upon a sin has done the sin, whether his hands have been put to it or no.

But, then, turn for a moment to the other thought that is suggested here—that solemn picture of a soul left to do as it will, because Divine love has no other restraints which it can impose, and is bankrupt of motives that it can adduce to prevent it from its madness. Now I do not believe, for my part, that any man in this world is so utterly "sold unto sin" as that the seeking love of God gives him up as irreclaimable. I do not believe that there are any people concerning whom it is true that it is impossible for the grace of God to find some chink and cranny in their souls, through which it can enter and change

them. There are no hopeless cases as long as men are here.

But, then, though there may not be so, in regard of the whole sweep of the man's nature, yet every one of us over and over again has known what it is to come exactly into that position, in regard to some single evil or other, concerning which we have so set our teeth and planted our feet at such an angle of resistance as that God gives up dealing with us and leaves us, as He did with Balaam, when he opposed his covetous inclinations to all the remonstrances of Heaven. God said at last to him "Go!" because it was the best way to teach him what a fool he had been in wishing to go. Thus, when we determine to set ourselves against the pleadings and the beseechings of Divine love, the truest kindness is to fling the reins upon our necks. and let us gallop ourselves into sweat and weariness, and then we shall be more amenable to the touch of the bit thereafter.

Are there any people here now whom God is teaching obedience to His light touch, by letting them run their course after some one specific sin? Perhaps there are. At all events, let us remember that that sad fate of being allowed to do as we like is one to which we all tend, in the measure in which we indulge our inclinations, and shut our hearts against God's pleadings. There is such a thing as a conscience seared as with a hot iron. They used to say that there were witches' marks in the body; places where, if you shoved a pin in, there was no feeling. Men cover themselves all over with marks of that sort, which are not sensitive even to the prick of Divine remonstrance, rebuke, or retri-

bution. "They wipe their mouths and say, I have done no harm." You can tie up the clapper of the bell that swings on the black rock, on which, if you drift, you go to pieces. You can silence the voice by the simple process of neglecting it. Judas set his teeth against two things, the solemn conviction that Jesus Christ knew his sin, and the saving assurance that Jesus Christ loved him still. And whosoever resists either of these two is getting perilously near to the point where, not in petulance, but in pity, God will say: "Very well, I have called and ye have refused. Now go, and do what you want to do, and see how you like it when it is done." "What thou doest, do quickly." Do you remember the other word: "If *'twere* done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly." But since consequences last when deeds are past, perhaps you had better halt before you determine to do it.

II.—Now, secondly, I hear in these words the voice of strangely blended majesty and humiliation.

"What thou doest, do!" Judas thought he had got possession of Christ's person, and was His master in a very real sense. When lo! all at once the victim assumes the position of the Lord, and commands; showing the traitor that, instead of thwarting and counter-working, he was but carrying out the designs of his fancied victim; and that he was an instrument in Christ's hands for the execution of His will. And these two thoughts, how, in effect, all antagonism, all malicious hatred, all violent opposition of every sort but work in with Christ's purpose, and fulfil His intention; and how, at the moments of deepest apparent degradation, He towers, in manifest majesty

and masterhood, seem to me to be plainly taught in the word before us.

He uses His foe for the furtherance of His purpose. That has been the history of the world ever since. "The floods, O Lord, have lifted up their voice." And what have they done? Smashing against the breakwater, they but consolidate its mighty blocks, and prove that the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters. It has been so in the past; it is so to-day; it will be so till the end. Every Judas is unconsciously the servant of Him whom he seeks to betray; and finds out to his bewilderment that what he meant for a death-blow works the very purpose and will of the Lord against whom he has turned.

Again, the combination here, in such remarkable juxtaposition, of the two things—willing submission to the utmost extremity of shame which the treasonous heart can froth out in its malice; and, at the same time, the rising up in conscious majesty and lordship—is suggested to us by the words before us. That union of utter lowliness and transcendent loftiness runs through the whole life and history of our Lord. Did you ever think how strong an argument that strange combination, wrought out so inartificially throughout the whole of the gospels, is for their historical veracity? Suppose the problem had been given to poets to create, and to set in a series of appropriate scenes, a character with these two opposites stamped equally upon it, neither of them encroaching upon the domain of the other—viz., perfect humility and humiliation in circumstance, and majestic sovereignty and elevation above all circumstances—do you think that any of them could have solved the

problem, though Æschylus and Shakespeare had been amongst them, as these four men who wrote these four little tracts which we call gospels have done? How comes it that this most difficult of literary feats has been so triumphantly accomplished by these men? I think there is only one answer: Because they were reporters, and imagined nothing, but observed everything, and repeated what had happened. He reconciled these opposites who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, and yet the eternal Son of the Father; and the gospels have solved the problem only because they are simple records of its solution by Him.

Wherever in His history there is some trait of lowliness there is by the side of it a flash of majesty. Wherever in His history there is some gleaming out from the veil of flesh of the hidden glory of divinity there is immediately some drawing of the veil across the glory. And the two things do not contradict nor confuse, but we stand before that double picture of a Christ betrayed and of a Christ commanding His betrayer, and using his treason, and we say, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us."

III.—Again, I hear the voice of instinctive human weakness.

"That thou doest, do quickly." It may be doubtful, and some of you perhaps may not be disposed to follow me in my remark, but to my ear that sounds very like the utterance of that instinctive dislike of suspense, and of the long hanging over us of the sword by a hair, which we all know so well. Better to suffer than to wait for suffering. The loudest thunder-crash is not so awe-inspiring as the dread silence of Nature

when the sky is black, before the peal rolls through the clouds. Many a martyr has prayed for a swift ending of his troubles. Many a sorrowing heart, that has been sitting cowering under the anticipation of coming evils, has wished that the string could be pulled, as it were, and that they could all come down in one cold flood and be done with, rather than trickle drop by drop. They tell us that the bravest soldiers dislike the five minutes when they stand in rank before the first shot is fired. And with all reverence I venture to think that He who knew all our weaknesses, in so far as weakness was not sin, is here letting us see how He, too, desired that the evil which was coming might come quickly, and that the painful tension of expectation might be as brief as possible. That may be doubtful; I do not dwell upon it, but I suggest it for your consideration.

IV.—And then I pass on to the last of the tones that I hear in these utterances—the voice of the willing Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

"That thou doest, do quickly." There is nothing more obvious throughout the whole of the latter portion of the Gospel narrative than the way in which, increasingly towards its close, He seemed to hasten to the Cross. You remember His own sayings: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished. I am come to cast fire on the earth. Would it were already kindled." You remember with what a strange air—I was going to use an inappropriate word, and say, of alacrity; but, at all events, of fixed resolve—He journeyed from Galilee, in that last solemn march to Jerusalem, and how the disciples followed, astonished at the unwonted

air of decision and absorption that was printed upon His countenance. If we look at His doings in that last week in Jerusalem, how He courted publicity, how He avoided no encounter with His official enemies, how He sharpened His tones, not exactly so as to provoke, but certainly so as by no means to conciliate, we shall see, I think, in all, His consciousness that the hour had come, and His absolute readiness and willingness to be offered for the world's sin. He stretches out His hands, as it were, to draw the Cross nearer to Himself, not with any share in the weakness of a fanatical aspiration after martyrdom, but under a far deeper and more wonderful impulse.

Why was Christ so willing, so eager, if I may use the word, that His death should be accomplished? Two reasons, which at bottom are one, answer the question. He thus hastened to His Cross because He would obey the Father's will, and because He loved the whole world—you and me and all our fellows. We were each in His heart. It was because He wanted to save thee that He said to Judas, "Do it quickly, that the world's salvation and this man's salvation may be accomplished." These were the cords that bound Him to the altar. Let us never forget that Judas with his treachery, and rulers with their hostility, and Pilate with his authority, and the soldiers with their nails, and centurions with their lances, and the grim figure of Death itself with its shaft would have been all equally powerless against Christ, if it had not been His loving will to die on the Cross for each of us.

Therefore, brethren, as we hear this voice, let us discern in it the tones which warn us of the danger of yielding to inclination and stifling His rebukes, till

He abandons us for the moment in despair; let us hear in it the pathetic voice of a Brother who knows all our weaknesses and has felt our emotions; let us hear the voice of sovereign authority which uses its enemies for its purposes, and is never loftier than when it is most lowly, whose cross is His throne of glory, whose exaltation is His deepest humiliation, and let us hear a love which, discerning each of us through all the ages and the crowds, went willingly to the Cross, because He willed that He should be our Saviour.

And, seeing that time is short, and the future precarious, and delay may darken into loss and rejection, let us take these words as spoken to us in another sense, and hear in them the warning that "to-day, if ye will hear His voice," we harden not our hearts. And when He says to us, in regard of repentance and faith, and Christian consecration and service, "That thou doest, do quickly," let us answer, "I made haste and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments."

XXX.

Salvation and Destruction continuous Processes.

"THE preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."—1 COR. i. 18.

THE starting-point of my remarks now is the observation that a slight variation of rendering, which will be found in the Revised Version, brings out the true meaning of these words. Instead of reading "them that perish" and "us which are saved," we ought to read "them that *are perishing*," and "us which *are being* saved." That is to say, the Apostle represents the two contrasted conditions, not so much as fixed states, either present or future, but rather as processes which are going on, and are manifestly, in the present, incomplete. That opens some very solemn and intensely practical considerations.

Then I may further note that this antithesis includes the whole of the persons to whom the Gospel is preached. In one or other of these two classes they all stand. Further, we have to observe that the consideration which determines the class to which

men belong is the attitude which they respectively take to the preaching of the Cross. If it be, and because it is, "foolishness" to some, they belong to the catalogue of the perishing. If it be, and because it is, "the power of God" to others, they belong to the class of those who are in process of being saved.

So, then, we have the ground cleared for two or three very simple, but, as it seems to me, very important thoughts.

I.—I desire, first, to look at the two contrasted conditions, "perishing" and "being saved."

Now we shall best, I think, understand the force of the darker of these two terms if we first ask what is the force of the brighter and more radiant. If we understand what the Apostle means by "saving" and "salvation," we shall understand, also, what he means by "perishing."

If, then, we turn for a moment to Scripture analogy and teaching, we find that the threadbare word "salvation," which we all take it for granted that we understand, and which, like a well-worn coin, has been so passed from hand to hand that it scarcely remains legible—that well-worn word "salvation" starts from a double metaphorical meaning. It means either, and is used for both, being healed or being made safe. In the one sense it is often employed in the Gospel narratives of our Lord's miracles, and it involves the metaphor of a sick man and his cure. In the other it involves the metaphor of a man in peril and his deliverance and security. The negative side, then, of the Gospel idea of salvation is the making whole from a disease, and the making safe from a danger. Nega-

tively, it is the removal, from each of us, of the one sickness, which is sin; and the one danger, which is the reaping of the fruits and consequences of sin, in their variety as guilt, remorse, habit, and slavery under it, perverted relation to God, a fearful apprehension of penal consequences now, and—if there be a hereafter—then, too. This sickness of soul and these perils that threaten life flow from the central fact of sin. And salvation consists, negatively, in the sweeping away of all of these, whether the sin itself, or the fatal facility with which we yield to it, or the desolation and perversion which it brings into all the faculties and susceptibilities, or the perversion of relation to God, and the consequent evils, here and hereafter, which throng around the evil-doer. The sick man is healed, and the man in peril is set in safety.

But, besides that, there is a great deal more. Our cure is incomplete till the full tide of health follows convalescence. When God saves, He does not only bar up the iron gate, through which the hosts of evil rush out upon the defenceless soul, but He flings wide the golden gate, through which the glad troops of blessings and of graces flock around the delivered spirit, and enrich it with all joys and with all beauties. So the positive side of salvation is the investiture of the saved man with throbbing health through all his veins, and the strength that comes from a divine life. It is the bestowal upon the delivered man of everything that he needs for blessedness and for duty. All good conferred, and every evil banned back into its dark den, such is the Christian conception of salvation. It is much that the negative should be accomplished, but it is little in comparison with the rich fulness of

positive endowments, of happiness, and of holiness which make an integral part of the salvation of God.

This, then, being the one side, what about the other? If this be salvation, its precise opposite is the Scriptural idea of "perishing." Utter ruin lies in the word, the entire failure to be what God meant a man to be. That is in it, and no contortions of arbitrary interpretation can take that solemn significance out of the dreadful expression. If salvation be the cure of the sickness, perishing is the fatal end of the unchecked disease. If salvation be the deliverance from the outstretched claws of the harpy evils that crowd about the trembling soul, then perishing is the fixing of their poisoned talons into their prey, and their rending of it into fragments.

Of course that is metaphor, but no metaphor can be half so dreadful as the plain, prosaic fact that the exact opposite of the salvation, which consists in the healing from sin, and the deliverance from danger, and in the endowment with all gifts good and beautiful, is the Christian idea of the alternative "perishing." Then, it means the disease running its course. It means the dangers laying hold of the man in peril. It means the withdrawal, or the non-bestowal, of all which is good, whether it be good of holiness or good of happiness. It does not mean, as it seems to me, the cessation of conscious existence, any more than salvation means the bestowal of conscious existence. But he who perishes knows that he has perished, even as he knows himself while he is in the process of perishing. Therefore, we have to think of the gradual fading away from consciousness and dying out of a life, of many things beautiful and sweet and gracious,

of the gradual increase of distance from Him, union with whom is the condition of true life, of the gradual sinking into the pit of utter ruin, of the gradual increase of that awful death in life and life in death in which living consciousness makes the conscious subject aware that he is lost: lost to God, lost to himself.

Brethren, it is no part of my business to enlarge upon such awful thoughts, but the brighter the light of salvation, the darker the eclipse of ruin which rings it round. This, then, is the first contrast.

II.—Now note, secondly, the progressiveness of both members of the alternative.

All states of heart or mind tend to increase, by the very fact of continuance. Life is a process, and every part of a spiritual being is in living motion and continuous action in a given direction. So the law for the world, and for every man in it, in all regions of his life, quite as much as in the religious, is, "to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance."

Look, then, at this thought of the process by which these two conditions become more and more confirmed, consolidated, and complete. Salvation is a progressive thing. In the New Testament we have that great idea looked at from three points of view. Sometimes it is spoken of as having been accomplished in the past in the case of every believing soul—"Ye have been saved" is said more than once. Sometimes it is spoken of as being accomplished in the present —"Ye are saved" is said more than once. And sometimes it is relegated to the future—"Now is your salvation nearer than when ye believed," and the like.

But there are a number of New Testament passages which coincide with this text in regarding salvation as, not the work of any one moment, but as a continuous operation running through life; not a point either in the past, present, or future, but a continued life. As, for instance, "The Lord added to the Church daily those that were being saved." "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are being sanctified." And in a passage in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which, in some respects, is an exact parallel to that of my text, we read of the preaching of the Gospel as being a "savour of Christ in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing."

So the process of being saved is going on as long as a Christian man lives in this world; and every one who professes to be Christ's follower ought, day by day, to be growing more and more saved, more fully filled with that Divine spirit, more entirely the conqueror of his own lusts and passions and evil, more and more invested with all the gifts of holiness and of blessedness which Jesus Christ is ready to bestow upon us.

Ah! brethren, that notion of a progressive salvation at work in all true Christians has all but faded away out of the beliefs, as it has all but disappeared from the experience, of hosts of you that call yourselves Christ's followers, and are not a bit further on than you were ten years ago; are no more healed of your corruptions (perhaps less, for relapses are dangerous) than you were then; have not advanced any further into the depths of God than when you first got a glimpse of Him as loving, and your Father,

in Jesus Christ; are contented to linger, like some weak band of invaders in a strange land, on the borders and coasts, instead of pressing inwards and making it all your own. Growing Christians—may I venture to say?—are not the majority of professing Christians.

And, on the other side, as certainly, there is progressive deterioration and approximation to disintegration and ruin. How many men there are listening to me now who were far nearer being delivered from their sins when they were lads than they have ever been since! How many in whom the sensibility to the message of salvation has disappeared, in whom the world has ossified their consciences and their hearts, in whom there is a more entire and unstruggling submission to low things and selfish things and worldly things and wicked things than there used to be! I am sure that there are people in this place to-day who were far better, and far happier, when they were poor and young, and could still thrill with generous emotion and tremble at the Word of God, than they are now. Why! there are some of you that could no more bring back your former loftier impulses, and compunction of spirit and throbs of desire towards Christ and His salvation, than you could bring back the birds' nests or the snows of your youthful years. You are perishing—in the very process of going down and down and down into the dark.

Now, notice, the Apostle treats these two classes as covering the whole ground of the hearers of the Word, and as alternatives. If not in the one class, we are in the other. Ah! brethren, life is no level plane, but a steep incline on which there is no standing still,

and if you try to stand still, down you go. Either up or down must be the motion. If you are not more of a Christian than you were a year ago, you are less If you are not more saved—for there is a degree of comparison—if you are not more saved, you are less saved.

Now, do not let that go over your head as pulpit thunder, meaning nothing. It means *you*, and whether you feel or think it or not, one or other of these two solemn developments is at this moment going on in you. And that is not a thought to be put lightly on one side.

Further, note what a light such considerations as these, that salvation and perishing are vital processes —"going on all the time," as the Americans say— throw upon the future. Clearly the two processes are incomplete here. You get the direction of the line, but not its natural termination. And thus a heaven and a hell are demanded by the phenomena of growing goodness and of growing badness which we see round about us. The arc of the circle is partially swept. Are the compasses going to stop at the point where the grave comes in? By no means. Round they will go, and will complete the circle. But that is not all. The necessity for progress will persist after death; and all through the duration of immortal being, goodness, blessedness, holiness, godlikeness, will on the one hand, grow in brighter lustre; and on the other, alienation from God, loss of the noble elements of the nature, and all the other doleful darknesses which attend that conception of a lost man, will increase likewise. And so, two people, sitting side by side in these pews to-day, may start from the

same level, and by the operation of the one principle may the one rise and rise and rise till he is lost in God, and so finds himself, and the other sink and sink and sink into the obscurity of woe and evil that lies as a possibility beneath every human life.

III.—And now, lastly, notice the determining attitude to the Cross which settles the class to which we belong.

Paul, in my text, is explaining his reason for not preaching the Gospel with what he calls "the words of man's wisdom," and he says, in effect, "It would be of no use if I did, because what settles whether the Cross shall look 'foolishness' to a man or not is the man's whole moral condition, and what settles whether a man shall find it to be 'the power of God' or not is whether he has passed into the region of those that are being saved."

So there are two thoughts suggested which sound as if they were illogically combined, but which yet are both true. It is true that men perish, or are saved, because the Cross is to them respectively "foolishness" or "the power of God." And the other thing is true, that the Cross is to them "foolishness," or "the power of God," because respectively they are perishing or being saved. That is not putting the cart before the horse, but both aspects of the truth are true.

If you see nothing in Jesus Christ, and His death for us all, except "foolishness," something unfit to do you any good, and unnecessary to be taken into account in your lives—oh! my friends, *that* is the condemnation of your eyes, and not of the thing you look at. If a man, gazing on the sun at twelve o'clock on a June day, says to me, "It is not bright,' the only

thing I have to say to him is, "Friend, you had better go to an oculist." And if to us the Cross is "foolishness," it is because already the process of "perishing" has gone so far that it has attacked our capacity of recognising the wisdom and love of God when we see them.

But, on the other hand, if we clasp that Cross in simple trust, we find that it is the power which saves us out of all sins, sorrows, and dangers, and "shall save us," at last, "into His heavenly kingdom."

Dear friends, that message leaves no man exactly as it found him. My words, I feel, to-day have been very poor, set by the side of the greatness of the theme; but, poor as they have been, you will not be exactly the same man after them, if you have listened to them, as you were before. The difference may be very imperceptible, but it will be real. There will be one more, almost invisible, film over the eyeball; one more thin layer of wax on the ear; one more fold of insensibility round heart and conscience—or else some yielding to the love; some finger put out to take the salvation; some lightening of the pressure of the sickness; some removal of the peril and the danger. The same sun blinds diseased eyes and gladdens sound ones. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay. "This Child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel." "To the one He is the savour of life unto life; to the other He is the savour of death unto death." *Which* is He, for He *is* one of them, to you?

XXXI.

The Faithful Heart and the Present God.

"I HAVE set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."—PSALM xvi. 8.

HIS psalm touches the very high-water mark of the religious life in two aspects; its ardent devotion and its clear certainty of eternal blessedness beyond the grave. These two are connected, as cause and effect, since on my text follows this great "therefore"—"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh, also, shall rest in hope, for Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave, neither wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption." So this ancient singer speaks to us across the centuries, and bids us ask ourselves whether we, with all the blaze of light of a far fuller, more blessed, and heart-touching and soul-satisfying revelation of God than he had, can place ourselves by his side, and take for ourselves his grand declaration, "I have set the Lord always before me," and, therefore, "because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

There are three things then here—the effort of faith; the Ally whom the effort brings; and the courageous stability which His presence ensures.

I.—The effort of faith: "I have set the Lord always before me."

The very language expresses for us the thought that it took a dead lift of conscious effort for the Psalmist to keep himself continually in touch with that unseen God. This is the very essence of true religion, for what is our religion if it is not the turning of our hearts continually, amidst, and from amidst, all the trivialities of this poor, low planet up to Him, and the realizing—by a conscious effort of an outgoing soul towards Him which is winged by desire, and impelled by a sense of need—of the thrilling and calming presence of Him who is invisible?

We talk about being Christians; we profess, some of us, to be religious men. Let us bring our pretensions to this simple test: Is the conscious effort of our lives directed with a frequency, which may deserve to be called habit, to the realization, amidst our daily duties, of that Divine presence?

Mark how the Psalmist came to this effort. It was because his whole soul clave to God, with the intelligent and reasonable conviction and apprehension that in God alone was all that he needed. No man will ever seek to bring himself into the presence of that Father, unless he knows that he can sun himself in the presence. If it is only a great Taskmaster's eye which we think is resting upon us, we shall crouch to hide from it rather than court it. But the Psalmist tells us how he came to make the attempt, and to carry it through all the changes of his life—"to set the Lord always before

him." For what goes before is this: "I have said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord; my good is none but Thee . . . the Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and" . . . (therefore) "I have a goodly heritage," having Him for the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup. And because thus he felt that all his blessedness was enwrapped in that one Divine Person, and that, whatsoever might call itself and be good, in some subordinate fashion, and as meeting some lower mental or material necessities, there was only one real good for him, satisfying all the depth and circumference of his being. It was only because this was his rooted conviction that he grudged every moment in which he was not living in the light of that countenance, and feeling the worth of the treasure which he possessed in God. But we are often actually ignorant, so to speak, of what we habitually know, and often without the conscious realization of the possession (which is the only real possession) of the riches that are most truly ours. If a man does not think about his wife and his children, it is for the time being all one as if they did not exist. If he does not think about God and His love, it is all one as if he had not Him and it. If we truly are knit to Him by inward sentiments of dependence, thankfulness, love, and obedience, our hearts will not be satisfied, unless we make the effort to reach our hands through all the shadows to grasp the reality, as a man might thrust his fist through some drum, with thin paper in it, in order to clutch some treasure lying beyond.

"I have set the Lord always before me," is the voice of true love, and true love is true religion. If

we can count up the number of times to-day in which we have thought about God—and I am afraid some of us could do it very easily—we have thought about Him too little. "I have set the Lord *always* before me," like a long band of light running through the whole life. But in the lives of far too many so-called Christians the points of light are dim and far apart, and sending little illumination into the dark intervals, as in some ill-lighted back street.

The effort of faith is the essence of religion, and we have no right to call ourselves Christians unless we can say in some real measure, "I have *set* the Lord" —for it took a dead lift to do it—"always before me."

II.—Notice the ally of faith.

I suppose that the second portion of my text is to be interpreted as being the consequence of the effort. "He is at my right hand." Would He have been David, if you had not set Him there? No! Of course, apart from effort there would have been that real sustained presence of God without which no life is possible, nor any existence. For I believe, for my part, that when we talk about Omnipresence we mean that where God is not nothing can be; and that this influence, which is His real presence, "preserves the stars from wrong," and keeps in life every living thing; so as that it is the simplest and deepest truth "in Him we," and all creatures, "live and move and have our being." But that is not what the Psalmist means. He is thinking of a presence a great deal more intimate, and of the communication of blessings a great deal more select and precious than creatural life, when he speaks about the presence of God at his right hand, as the direct result of his own definite,

conscious, and habitual effort to keep Him there. He means that by the turning of his thoughts to God, and the effort he makes—the effort of faith, imagination, love, and desire—to bring himself as close as he can to the great heart of the Father, he realizes that presence at his side in an altogether different manner from that in which it is given to stones and rocks and birds and beasts and godless men.

That Divine presence is the source of all strength and blessedness. "At my right hand"; then I stand at His left, and if I stand at His left I stand close under the arm that carries the shield, and the shield will be cast around me, and stretched above my head to protect me. "At my right hand"; then He is not only my Ally in the fight, but He stands close by my instrument of activity, to direct my work, so that I can

> "Labour on at Thy command,
> And offer all my works to Thee."

"At my right hand"; then He is my Protector, my Ally, and Director of my work, and He lays His strong, gentle hand upon my little, feeble one, and puts deftness into its fingers and power into its muscles, as the prophet did when he laid his brown, strong hand on the thin fingers of the dying king, to help him to draw his bow. So God stands at our right hand, to defend us in peril, to direct us in effort, and to impart to us power for toil and service. Thus blessed, real, communicative of all needful good, and bringing it all with Himself, through His presence realized by the effort of a loving faith, God stands at our right hand, and we are blessed and safe if He be there.

Solitude is no experience for a true, God-loving heart. We are least alone when we are most alone, for then, if we are His, we may most fully realize His presence. So if any of you are disposed sometimes to say that the road is dark and long and rough, and you have to tread it unaccompanied, "set the Lord always before" you, and, with Him at your "right hand," He and you will be—I was going to say, enough for one another, and, at any rate, will be—too many for all opposers. "I was left alone, and I saw this great vision." I was left alone, and God came to keep me company. That may be the experience of every soul.

III.—Lastly, notice the courageous stability of faith.

Because He is "at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Well, that is true all round, in regard of all the things which may move and shake a man. If we have the felt presence of God with us, making sunshine in our lives, think how it will keep us from being unduly moved by our own emotions, fluctuations, hopes, passions. Hope and fear will equally be toned down; calmness will be given to us instead of agitations; we shall not be tossed about by every wind of desire, nor beaten about by every surge of temptation; but, anchored on Him, we may ride out the storm, and, safe behind that breakwater which keeps the force and weight of the wild ocean off us, we may feel but a modified and calm pressure from storms that otherwise would shake us from our composure. The secret of a quiet heart—which is a very different thing from a stagnant one—is to keep ever near God. Leaning upon Him, we shall not be shaken as

we otherwise would, and shall be masters of ourselves; and if we are masters of ourselves, nothing outside of us will much move us. "His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." In everything, by prayer and thanksgiving, make God present to yourselves, and yourselves present to God, and "the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds."

In like manner, if we have a present God, we shall not be moved by circumstances. There will be a wholesome and wise obstinacy, like that displayed by the Apostle when he said, "Bonds and afflictions abide me, but none of these move me; neither count I my life dear to myself," in order that I may carry out to the end, whatever that end may be, the mission which I have received of the Lord. And depend upon it that, if we live, taking counsel from our Father in heaven, and realizing, as we may do, His presence with us, and the continual communication, by underground channels, of His grace to us, the world, with all its changes, will not much affect us. Like those disciples of whom we read in connection with Paul's wholesome obstinacy, "when he would not be persuaded," we cease, saying "The will of the Lord be done." The world will let you alone if it finds out that it cannot shake your purpose nor induce you to swerve from the path of duty, either by flashing before you pleasures or by frowning at you with threats and sorrows.

How quietly we may live above the storms if only we live in God! Some workmen in London in the last fogs happened to be engaged in repairing the weathercock upon a tall steeple, and when they got

to the top they found that they were in the sunshine, with blue sky above them, and all the noise of the city below their feet, there in the blackness. If you climb high enough, you will be far above the reach of the agitations and distractions of this life. Because "He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

But there is a yet more wonderful and higher application of the words, which results from the closing verses of this psalm. For the Psalmist passes beyond this confidence that he shall not be moved amid all the changes and possibilities of earthly life, and feels certain that even the great change from life to death will not move him, in so far as his union with God is concerned. It is beautiful to see that, whether the doctrines of a future life and of a Resurrection were part of the common religious possession of his age or no, we catch in this closing strain of the psalm the religious consciousness of the singer in the very act of grasping at the truth, which, whether revealed or no to his generation, was, at all events, very imperfectly revealed. Why was he so sure that Death and *Sheol*—the grave and corruption—were things that he had nothing to do with? Because he felt that God was at his right hand. If you translate that into more abstract terms, it is just this—a realization of true communion and intercourse with God is the real guarantee that the man who has it shall never die, and whosoever can feel "the Lord is at my right hand," may look forward into all the darkness of death and the grave, and say: "These have nothing to do with me. They may touch the husk; they may do what they like with the outside

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from earth to a dim beyond shall only be this, that
instead of His standing at our right hands, our Ally
and Director, we shall stand at His, and there find
how true the Psalmist's confidence was, "At Thy
right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

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